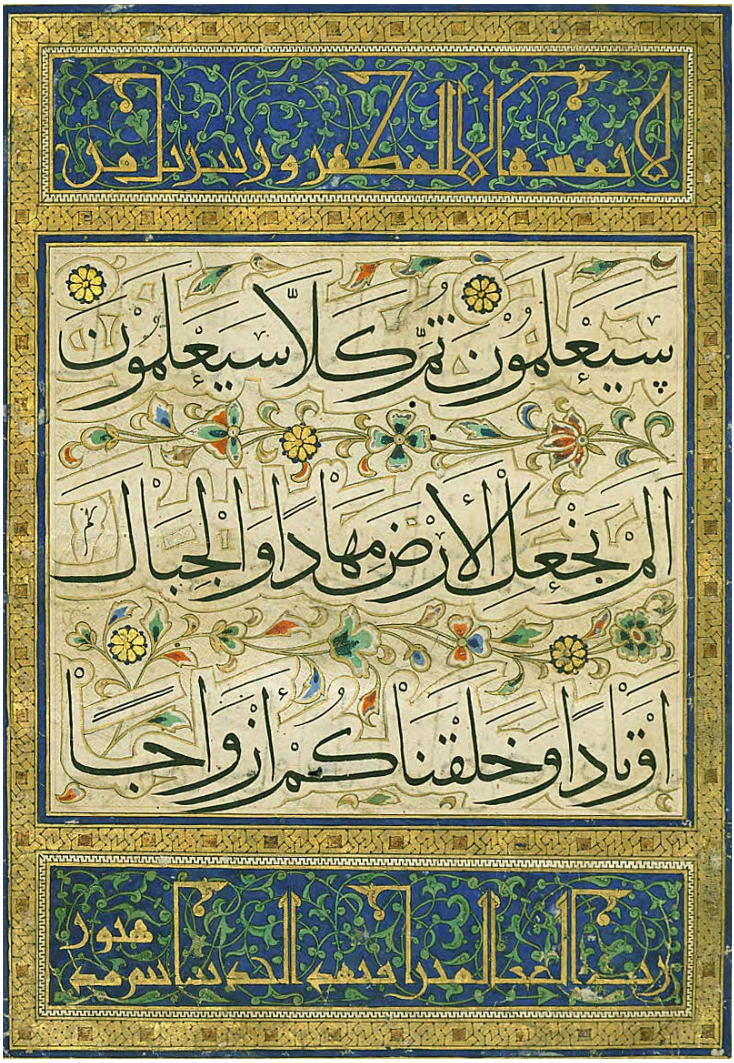
THE QURAN

AN ABIDING WONDER



MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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Foreword

This collection briefly discusses two aspects of the Quran: firstly, its being in itself a proof that it is the Book of God; secondly its complete preservation in its original form, as revealed to the Arab Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century Hijrah.

Many revelations had been made by God and committed to writing by His devotees before the advent of the Quran. Then what particularly distinguishes the sacred Islamic text from its forerunners? It is not just that it is complete and the other revealed books incomplete. To categorize the sacred scriptures in this way would amount to discriminating between the Prophets themselves which is certainly not right.

What then is its great distinguishing feature? There is only one. A simple, but a major one. The text of the Quran has never been tampered with, whereas all the other Books have long ago lost their original form and content, which has meant a serious loss of authenticity. It is this characteristic of the Quran—its perfect state of preservation—which singles it out from its predecessors as a unique vehicle for divine guidance and salvation, one which will retain its validity until Doomsday.

The preservation of the Quran was a laborious task requiring remarkable skill and dedication. As such, it was the most extraordinary undertaking of the age. This feat gains in importance when seen in the context of the loss of authority of previous texts which were not maintained in their pristine state. The Quran alone has survived as the completely preserved utterances of the Almighty.

God has absolute power over all things. If He has given man freedom throughout his lifespan in this world, it is purely in order to test him. So that if man made interpolations in, and even destroyed divine scriptures, it was because he chose to misuse this freedom. Finally, as an exceptional blessing to man, God made arrangements to preserve His guidance for future generations. That is how—by the special succour of God—the Prophet and his companions were victorious in their long tussle with the transgressors, thus ushering in a new era in world history.

They succeeded in replacing the old world with a new world which, with its unassailable fidelity to truth, afforded an eternal guarantee for the preservation of the Quran.

Wahiduddin Khan

PART ONE

Arguments of the Quran

CHAPTER ONE

The Quran: The Book of God

When Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, claimed that the Quran was a divine book revealed to him by God for the guidance of man, there were many who did not believe him. The scriptures to them were a human rather than a divine composition. The Quran then gave a challenge to these sceptics, asking them to produce "a scripture similar to it," if what they said were true. (52:34)

It declared, moreover, in no uncertain terms that, even if all the human beings and the jinns made collective and concerted efforts to produce a book like the Quran, they would all fail miserably in their attempt. (17:88) The Quran, being an eternal book, poses a perennial challenge, addressed to every human being under the sun until Doomsday.

Now the question arises as to the characteristics

this sacred book possesses which render it inimitable. Several aspects of its uniqueness are mentioned in the Quran, one of which is its consistency:

"Do they not ponder over the Quran? If it had not come from God, they would have found in it many contradictions (*ikhtilaf*)." (4:82)

(Professor Arberry has translated the Arabic word *ikhtilaf* as 'inconsistency'. Other renderings of the word include contradiction, disparity and difference.)

Total consistency is an extremely rare quality, one which is an exclusive attribute of God. It is, therefore, beyond any human being to compose a work in which there are no disparities. For a work to be quite flawless, the composer has to have a command of such knowledge as encompasses the past and the future and extends also to all objects of creation. There must be no shadow of doubt in his perception of the essential nature of things. Furthermore, his knowledge must be based on direct acquaintance, not on information indirectly received from others. And there is another unique quality he must possess: he must be able to see things, not in a prejudiced light, but as they actually are.

God and God alone can possess all these extraordinary qualities. For this reason, only His Word will remain perennially free of all inconsistency. The work of man, on the other hand, is always marred by imperfection, for man himself is imperfect; it does

not lie within his power to compose a work free of contradiction.

Contradictions in Human Reasoning

It is not by chance that the work of man is fraught with contradictions. It is inevitable, given the inherent limitations of human cerebral activity. Such is the nature of creation that it accepts only the Thought of its Creator. Any theory which is not in consonance with His thinking can find no place in the universe. It will contradict itself, for it stands at variance with the universe at large; it will be inconsistent, for it does not run true to the pattern of nature.

For this reason, intellectual inconsistency is bound to mar any theory conceived of by man. We shall illustrate this point by several examples.

Darwinism

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and other scientists after him, developed the theory of Evolution from their observations of living creatures. They saw that the various forms of life found on earth outwardly appeared different from one another. Yet, biologically, they bore a considerable resemblance to each other. The structure of a horse, for instance, when standing up on its two hind legs, was not unlike the human frame.

From these observations they came to the conclusion that man was not a separate species, and that along with other animals, he had originated from a common gene. All creatures were involved in a great evolutionary journey through successive stages of biological development. While reptiles, quadrupeds and monkeys were in an early stage of evolution, man was in an advanced stage.

For a hundred years this theory held sway over human thought. But then further investigations revealed that it had loopholes. It did not fully fit in with the framework of creation. In certain fundamental ways, it clashed with the order of the universe as a whole. For instance, there is the question of the age of the earth. By scientific calculation, it has been put at around two thousand million years old. Now this period is far too short to have accommodated the process of evolution envisaged by Darwin. It has been shown scientifically that for just one compound of protein molecule to have evolved, it would have taken more than just millions and millions of years. There are over a million different forms of animal life on earth and at least two hundred thousand fully developed vegetable species. How could they all have evolved in just two thousand million years? Not even an animal low down in the evolutionary scale could have developed in that time, let alone man, an advanced life form which could have developed only

after passing through countless evolutionary stages.

A mathematician, by the name of Professor Patau, has made certain calculations concerning the biological changes postulated by the theory of evolution. According to him, even a minor change in any species would take one million generations to be completed. From this, one can have an idea of how long a period would elapse before a dog, for example, turned into a horse. The multiple changes involved in such a complicated evolutionary process would have taken much too long for them to have happened during the human lifespan of the world.

As Fred Hoyle puts it, in *The Intelligent Universe*: Just how excruciatingly slowly genetic information accumulates by trial and error can be seen from a simple example. Suppose, very conservatively, that a particular protein is coded by a tiny segment in the DNA blueprint, just ten of the chemical links in its double helix. Without all ten links being in the correct sequence, the protein from the DNA doesn't work. Starting with all the ten wrong, how many generations of copying must elapse before all the links—and hence the protein—come right through random errors? The answer is easily calculated from the rate at which DNA links are miscopied, a figure which has been established by experiment.

'To obtain the correct sequence of ten links, by

miscopying, the DNA would have to reproduce itself on an average, about a hundred million members of the species all producing offspring, it would still take a million generations before even a single member came up with the required rearrangement. And if that sounds almost within the bounds of possibility, consider what happens if a protein is more complicated and the number of DNA links needed to code for it jumps from ten to twenty. A thousand billion generations would then be needed, and if one hundred links are required (as is often the case), the number of generations would be impossibly high because no organism reproduces fast enough to achieve this. The situation for the neo-Darwinism theory is evidently hopeless. It might be possible for genes to be modified slightly during the course of evolution, but the evolution of specific sequences of DNA links of any appreciable length is clearly not possible.' (p. 110)

And in any case, as Hoyle had earlier stated, 'Shufflings of the DNA code are disadvantageous, because they tend to destroy cosmic genetic information rather than to improve it.'

To solve this problem, another theory, called the Panspermia Theory, was formed. It held that life originated in outer space. From there it came to earth. But as it turned out, this theory created new problems of its own. Where in the vastness of space was there a

planet or a star with the conditions needed for life to develop? For example, there is nothing more essential to life than water. Nothing can come into existence or continue to survive without it. Yet no one knows of anywhere in the entire universe, except the earth, where it exists. We then had a certain body of intellectuals who favoured a theory of Emergent Evolution, according to which life—or its various forms—came into being all of a sudden. But this theory is empty of meaning. How can there be sudden appearance of life without the intervention of an outside force? So, we are back to where we started, with the Outside Force—or Creator—to discount which all these theories were originally invented.

The fact of the matter is, without taking a Creator into account, one cannot give a valid explanation of life. There is simply no other theory which fits in with the pattern of the universe. Being inconsistent with the nature of life, other theories fail to take firm root. It is indeed significant that eminent scholars from various fields have thought fit to contribute to an Encyclopaedia of Ignorance, which has been published in London. The book has the following introduction:

'In the *Encyclopaedia of Ignorance* some 60 well-known scientists survey different fields of research, trying to point out significant gaps in our knowledge of the world.'

What this work really amounts to is an academic acknowledgement of the fact that the Maker of the world has fashioned it in such a way that it just cannot be explained by any mechanical interpretation. For instance, as John Maynard Smith has written, the theory of evolution is beset with certain 'built-in' problems. There appears to be no solution to these problems, for all we have to go by are theories. And without concrete evidence, there is no way we can back up our theories.

According to the Quran, man and all other forms of life have been created by God. The theory of evolution, on the other hand, holds that they are all the result of a blind mechanical process. The Quranic interpretation explains itself, for God can do as He wills. He can create what He wishes without material resources. Such is not the case with the theory of evolution, which demands that there should be a cause for everything that happens. Such causes cannot be found, with the result that the theory of evolution is left without an explanation,—in an intellectual vacuum, one might say, while the same cannot be said of the explanation of life offered by the Quran.

Political Philosophy

The same is true of political philosophy. According to the 1984 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica:*

'Political philosophy and political conflict have evolved basically around who should have power over whom.' (14/697)

For five thousand years, eminent human brains have addressed their efforts toward finding an answer to this question. Yet they still have not been able to produce what Spinoza termed a 'scientific base' on which to form a coherent political philosophy.

Altogether, there are more than twelve schools of political thought, which fall into two broad categories: despotism and democracy. The first is strongly objected to on the grounds that no good reason can be found for one single individual to tyrannize the entire population of a country or countries. Although democracy, as opposed to despotism, has wide popular support, it has not provided fool-proof solutions either to philosophical or practical problems. The literal meaning of democracy—a word of Greek origin—is rule by the people. This notion has been widely hailed as a panacea of all ills, but, in practice, it has proved impossible to establish rule by the entire population of any given country. If all of the people are to govern, how can they—at the same time—be governed? If all the people cannot have power simultaneously, how can a popular government be formed? Various theories have been propounded, the most popular of which is Rousseau's, i.e. that it should be left to the General Will, which

can be determined by plebiscite. But this being a time-consuming and cumbersome process (not to speak the expense involved), government by the people becomes, in effect, government by a few elected individuals. People may be free to vote as they please, but after they have voted, they are once again subjected to the rule of a select group. Democratically elected rulers over the world are now seen to assume the same role as the monarchs of former times.

The notion of freedom is traditionally associated with democracy, but there, too, as a political system it does not necessarily make people more liberated than they were under overtly oppressive regimes. Although the entire basis of democracy is the belief that people are born equal, with equal rights and that they are free, Rousseau expresses the more immediate reality with the very first lines of his Social Contract, "Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains." Then, too, there is man's very nature to be considered. He is a social animal. Far from being an independent entity in this world with the liberty to live as he pleases, he is an integral part of the corpus of society. Another philosopher goes so far as to say that "Man is not born free. Man is born into society which imposes restraints on him."

Clearly, democracy, although in large measure an improvement on despotism, does not automatically

provide the key to solving the problems of restricted individual liberty and social inequality. Often, in the name of democracy, a dynastic monarchy is supplanted by an elective oligarchy, leaving the individual still feeling that he is no more than a pawn in the struggle for power. In the 18th and 19th centuries, people rose in rebellion against monarchical systems of government, but, once free of the yoke of kingly rule, they had to resign themselves to rule by an elite group calling themselves 'representatives of the people'—which did not seem much of an improvement on life under the old monarchs, who had laid claim to being 'representatives of God on earth.'

All political philosophers have been caught up in contradictions of this nature. And there appears no way out of the impasse. Even the so called "representation" of the people is open to question. Take the example of the British conservatives who, in one year, won a decisive victory, winning an overall majority of 144 seats. In terms of votes, however, the conservative share of the vote (43%) had fallen since 1979, i.e. as far as seats were concerned the conservatives had won a massive overall majority. But, as far as votes were concerned, they could muster only 43%. Could this be said to be truly representative of the people? Man's failure in this field has been summed up in these words: 'The history of political philosophy from Plato until the present day

makes it plain that modern political philosophy is still faced with the basic problems.

In fact, there is only one political philosophy that does not contradict itself, and that is the philosophy put forward by the Quran. The Quran says that only God has the right to rule over man: "“Have we any say in the matter?” they ask. Say to them: “All is in the hands of God,”" (3:154).

The idea of God as Sovereign makes for a coherent system of thought, free from all forms of contradiction. But when man is considered sovereign, there are bound to be contradictions and inconsistencies in the political theories that evolve. The aim of all political theories has been to eradicate the divisions between ruler and subjects. Yet no human system, whatever its nature, has been able to do this. In both the democratic and totalitarian systems, human equality has remained an unattainable ideal, for power has always had to be put in the hands of a few individuals, with others becoming their subjects. This disparity can only disappear when God is considered Sovereign. Then the only difference that remains is between God and man. He is the Ruler, all are His subjects. All men are equal before Him. There is no division and no distinction, between man and man.

Twofold Inconsistency

If the different parts of a book contradict each other, the book is inconsistent within itself. If the contents of a book, as a whole, or in part, contradict known facts, the book is inconsistent with external realities. The Quran claims—with justice—to be free of either type of inconsistency, whereas no work of human origin can be free of either. It follows, therefore, that the Quran must be superhuman in origin. Had it been written by a human being, it would have been flawed by inconsistencies of the type so frequently found in the works of man.

Contradictions within a work arise basically from the deficiencies of its author. If such imperfections are to be avoided, two things are essential: absolute knowledge and total objectivity. There is no human being who is not sadly deficient in both of these areas. It is only God who is omniscient, and flawless as a Being, and while works wrought by the human hand are invariably marred by inconsistencies, His book, and His book alone never contradicts itself.

Because of man's inherent limitations, there are many things which, intellectually, he cannot grasp. He is forced, therefore, to speculate, and this frequently leads him into making erratic judgements and unfounded contentions.

Every human being graduates from youth to old age, and when a man grows old, he often contradicts things he asserted as facts when he was young and immature. With age, his knowledge and experience increase, hence his final verdict stands at variance with his initial judgements. But even when death finally comes to take him away, he still has much to learn, and often the assertions of his mature age are proved wrong after his death. The truth is not arrived at purely through experience and reasoning.

Human beings, in addition to making inadvertent and unwitting errors are all too prone to make deliberate misrepresentations of facts when they are motivated by the base emotions of greed, envy, jealousy, revenge and fear.

Human moods and passions are often to blame for people turning a blind eye to the truth and falling a prey to faulty reasoning. Love and hate, friendship and hostility all have their influence on human thinking. A man's inability to be dispassionate, his elation or depression, his triumph or despair, his successes and frustrations all colour the quality of his thought. Such fluctuations of mood, caprice and willfulness, can deflect the very best minds from the truth.

The only one who is free of all such caprice and all such limitations is the Almighty. That is why His word is of an impeccable consistency.

Biblical Inconsistency

To illustrate this point, let us take the example of the Bible, which, as a book of revelation was the forerunner of the Quran.

Initially, the Bible was the word of God, but in later years it suffered from human interpolations, with the result that many internal contradictions began to sully its pages. A case in point is the genealogy of the Messiah, which has been given in several places in that part of the Bible known as the *Injil*, or New Testament. The Gospel according to Matthew begins with this abridged genealogy: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1)

The genealogy of Christ is then given in detail, beginning with Abraham and ending with Joseph who, according to the New Testament was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." (Matt. 1: 16)

When the reader turns to the Gospel according to Mark, he finds these words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark. 1:1)

According to one chapter of the New Testament, Jesus was the son of a person named Joseph, while another chapter of this very New Testament says he was the son of God.

Undoubtedly, in its original form, the *Injil* was the Word of God and free of all inconsistencies. It was only

in later years, that human beings made additions of their own, introducing contradictions into a formerly consistent text. The Christian Church has evolved yet another extraordinary contradiction in order to explain away this discrepancy in its sacred book. The description given of Joseph in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984 edition) is as follows: 'Christ's earthly father, the Virgin Mary's husband.'

Secular Contradictions

For an instance of serious internal contradiction in secular writings, I turn to the works of Karl Marx, who commands an immense following in the modern world. The famous American economist, John Galbraith, has written of him:

'If we agree that the Bible is a work of collective authorship, only Mohammad rivals Marx in the number of professed and devoted followers recruited by a single author. And the competition is not really very close. The followers of Marx now far outnumber the sons of the Prophet.'

But Marx's enormous popularity does not change the fact that his work is little better than a collection of glaring contradictions. For example, Marx considers the existence of class as the root of all evil in the world. According to his philosophy, class distinction is derived from the system of private ownership, and the control

exercised by the bourgeoisie over the means of production enables them to plunder the lower labouring class.

The solution prescribed by Marx consisted of confiscating the properties of the capitalist class and putting them under the administration of the labouring class. Thus, he claimed, a classless society would come into being. But herein lies the basic flaw in Marx's philosophy. For what comes into existence as a result of this transfer is not a classless society, but a society in which one class takes over where the other leaves off where one class previously controlled the economy by virtue of ownership, another class now controls it by virtue of its right to administer. Marx's so-called classless society, was, in fact, one in which capitalist ownership was replaced by communist ownership.

What Marx had condemned in one place, he condoned in another. But due to his great antipathy for and antagonism towards the capitalist class, he was unable to see his own contradiction in thought. He was in favour of taking the control of economic resources away from capitalists and entrusting it to officials. But, blinded by prejudice, he failed to see what he was doing. He gave separate names to two different forms of the very same phenomenon: in the one case, he called it plunder of the many by the few, in the other, he termed it 'social order.'

The Quran, on the other hand, is completely free of

self-contradiction of this nature, and there is absolute harmony in its content. Even so, opponents of the Quran have tried to prove that contradictions do occur in it. All the examples they cite in this regard, however, have no connection whatsoever with the case they are trying to prove. They say, for instance, that in the sermon of his Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet stated that all men were from Adam, and Adam was from the earth. According to this principle women should enjoy the same status as men. In practice, however, this is not the case, say opponents of the Quran, who point to the inferior position women have been allotted in Islamic society. They then cite the fact that the testimony of two women is equated in law with that of one man. It is true that this is so, but only in special sets of circumstances, as is made clear in the verse of the Quran where this rule has been laid down. The verse in question deals with the written recording of debts:

'And take two male witnesses. If there are not two men, then one man and two women—you may select the witnesses of your choice. If one woman forgets, the other will be able to remind her.'

The wording of the verse shows quite clearly that the basis of this rule is—not discrimination between the sexes—but rather allowances being made for the inferior memorizing ability of women. What is alluded to is a biological fact—that women are not as adept at

remembering things as men. This is why, if women's testimony is to be accepted in loans cases, there should be two of them: so that if at any time subsequently, they are required to give evidence, one of them should be able to compensate for the other's poor memory.

It should be borne in mind that any other interpretation of this rule shows a total misunderstanding of the scriptures. It should be borne in mind that modern research has confirmed what the Quran asserts—that women's memory is weaker than that of men. Russian scientists have gone into this matter in great detail, and their conclusion has been published in book form. A summary, entitled 'Memorizing Ability', appeared in the New Delhi edition of the *Times of India* on January 18, 1985:

> 'Men have a greater ability to memorize and process mathematical information than women, but females are better with words,' says a Soviet scientist. (UPI) 'Men dominate mathematical subjects due to the peculiarities of their memory,' Dr. Vladimir Konovalov told the Tass news agency.

The Quranic rule, far from evincing any contradiction, proves in fact that the Quran has come from One who has absolute knowledge of the facts of existence. He sees things from every angle, and so is in a position to issue commandments that are in total harmony with nature.

External Inconsistency

Now we turn to external inconsistency. External inconsistency in a literary work occurs when what it asserts is contradicted by some reality in the outside world. Since man's speech and writing occur within the sphere of his own knowledge, which is marked by human limitations, what he writes or says fails to conform to the external reality. We produce here a few comparative examples to illustrate this point.

Certain ancient Arab tribes sometimes killed their children, in most cases female babies, for fear of being unable to feed a large family. It was in this context that the following verses were revealed:

> Do not kill your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Truly, the killing of them is a great sin. (17:31)

Inherent in this pronouncement of the Quran was the claim that the growth in population, whatever its extent and degree, would not create a problem of sustenance for man on the earth; that there would be a constant favourable balance of sustenance and human population; that there would be an adequate provision of sustenance tomorrow just as there is today.

Throughout the ages, Muslims have been endorsing this claim as a matter of faith. They have left this matter to God, the great Provider.

One thousand years after this claim made by the Quran, the British economist, Robert Malthus

(1766–1834) published in 1798 his book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, in which he set forth his famous theory on the growth of population. 'Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence only increases in an arithmetical ratio.'

Simply stated, growth in population and growth in sustenance are not naturally equal. Human population grows geometrically, that is at a ratio of 1 - 2 - 4 - 8 - 1 6 - 32, while the growth of food supplies maintains an arithmetical ratio: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8. Sustenance, therefore, cannot keep up with the astronomical growth in human population. The only solution to this problem, according to Malthus, was for mankind to control its birth-rate. The population should not be allowed to exceed a certain limit, failing which the number of people on earth would become disproportionate to the amount of sustenance available, thereby ushering in an age of famine in which countless people would starve to death.

Malthus's book made a powerful impression, winning substantial support among writers and thinkers, and leading to the launching of birth control and family-planning schemes. Recently, however, researchers have come to the conclusion that Malthus was quite wrong in

his calculations. Gwynne Dwyer has summarized this research in an article, provocatively entitled ‘Malthus: The False Prophet,’ which appeared in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi) on December 28, 1984:

> It is the 150th anniversary of Malthus’ death, and his grim predictions have not yet come true. The world’s population has doubled and redoubled in a geometrical progression as he foresaw, only slightly checked by wars and other catastrophes, and now stands at about eight times the total when he wrote. But food production has more than kept pace, and the present generation of humanity, is on average the best fed in history.

Malthus was born in an age of ‘traditional agriculture.’ He was unable to envisage the approach of an age of ‘scientific agriculture,’ in which amazing advances in production would become possible. Over the 150 years since Malthus’s death, methods of cultivation have been radically altered. Crops under cultivation are chosen for their particularly high yield. Cattle are able to produce a far higher amount of dairy food than before. New methods have been discovered to increase the fertility of land. Modern machinery has brought vast new areas under cultivation. In technologically advanced countries of the world there has been a 90% fall in the number of farmers: yet at the same time a tenfold increase in agricultural produce has taken place.

As far as the third world is concerned, 3 billion people inhabit these under-developed countries, but the third world also possesses the potential to produce food for 33 billion—ten times the present population. According to F.A.O. estimates, if the increase in the population of the third world continues unabated, reaching over the 4 billion mark by the year 2000 A.D., there will still be no cause for alarm. The increase in population will be accompanied by an increase in production: the means will be available to provide food for 1½ times more than the number of people who have to be fed. And this increase in food production will be possible without deforestation. So, there is no real danger of a food crisis, either on a regional or on a universal scale. Gwynne Dwyer concludes his report with the following words: 'Malthus was wrong. We are not doomed to breed ourselves into famine.'

Where Malthus's book on population and sustenance—the work of a human mind working within the confines of time and place—was very far out in its predictions for the human race, (and this was proved to the world just 150 years after the author's death) the Quran, on the other hand—the work of a superhuman mind—still bears out external realities to this very day.

Historical Inaccuracy

In the 20th century B.C., during the time of the Prophet Joseph, the Children of Israel entered Egypt. Seven centuries later they left Egypt along with Moses, crossing over into the Sinai Peninsula. These events are mentioned in both the Bible, and the Quran. But, while the account in the Quran is entirely consistent with external history, the Bible relates several incidents which do not correspond to historical records. This has created problems for believers in the Bible. Should they accept what is written in the Bible, or should they go by history? Since the two contradict one another, they cannot accept both at the same time.

On January 12, 1985, a gathering was held in the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies at Tughlaqabad in New Delhi, which was addressed by Ezra Kolet, president of the Council of Indian Jewry. His topic was: 'What is Judaism?' Naturally, he dealt with Jewish history in his talk, mentioning, among other things, the Jew's entrance into and exodus from Egypt. The names of both Joseph and Moses figured in his talk as well as the kings who were ruling in Egypt in their respective times. For both kings, the contemporaries of Joseph and Moses, he used the term 'Pharaoh.'

As everyone acquainted with the period knows, this nomenclature is historically incorrect. The reign of the

kings known as Pharaohs did not begin until the time of Moses: in Joseph's day, a different line of monarchs ruled in Egypt.

When Joseph entered Egypt, the kings of a dynasty known as the Hyksos were in power. They were ethnically Arabs, and had usurped the Egyptian throne, reigning from 2000 B.C. until the end of the 15th century B.C. at which time the indigenous population rebelled against foreign rule, thus bringing the Hyksos dynasty to an end.

Home rule was then established in Egypt. The clan that took over sovereignty chose for itself the name of Pharaoh, which literally means son of the sun-god, for in those days Egyptians worshipped the sun, and in order to vindicate their right to rule over the Egyptians, they made themselves out to be incarnations of the sun-god.

In effect, Mr. Kolet was calling the Hyksos Kings, Pharaohs. He had no option in this, for that is what they are called in the Bible, with reference to both Joseph's and Moses' respective periods. The Jewish speaker could either accept the Bible or history, but not both simultaneously. Since he was speaking in his capacity as president of the Jewish Council, he put history aside and based his talk on biblical accounts.

But in the Quran, we do not find accounts which clash with history in this way, and those who follow the

Quran are not compelled to forsake history in order to uphold their Holy Book. When the Quran was revealed, people had no knowledge of ancient Egyptian history. Only in later years did archeological excavations make it possible for Egyptologists to compile a record of the history of that country's ancient kings.

Even so, the Quran mentions the Egyptian monarch who was a contemporary of Joseph, and refers to him by the title, of 'King of Egypt.' As for the king who ruled in Moses' day, the Quran repeatedly calls him Pharaoh. We thus have a Quranic account that corresponds exactly with historical facts, unlike the biblical account which is historically inaccurate. This shows that the Quran was written without recourse to human sources of knowledge, by One who had direct access to the Truth.

An Example from History

According to the theory of evolution, both man and animals are descended from a common ancestor. That is, a single animal species passed through many gradual stages of evolution, ultimately developing into the chimpanzee, and finally, homo sapiens.

Even if we take for granted the theory of evolution, there are 'missing-links' between these evolutionary stages between animal and man which have still to be accounted for. Where are the species still in the

process of evolution possessing both animal and human features? Though no such real middle link has yet been discovered, evolutionists believe that such species did exist and will one day be discovered.

In 1912, the English newspapers trumpeted the news that a fragment of an ancient skull, half, ape and half man, dating back to some nebulous, pre-historic period, had been found at Piltdown, thus providing material evidence which confirmed Darwin's theory of evolution.

This Piltdown Man achieved instant popularity. The name appeared in standard text, books such as R.S. Lull's *Organic Evolution*. Leading intellectuals counted the discovery among the great triumphs of modern man. In authoritative works such as H.G. W ells' *Outline of History* and Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, it was mentioned as though there was no doubt about the Piltdown Man's existence.

For nearly half a century, scholars remained enthralled with this "great discovery." It was only in 1953 that some scientists became doubtful. They extracted the Piltdown man from its iron, fire-proof box in the British Museum and subjected it to detailed, modern, scientific analysis, studying it from every relevant angle. Their final conclusion was that the Piltdown Man was a forgery. The great acclaim it had

received was totally unfounded. What had actually happened was that someone, who wished to discredit a rival by playing a trick on him, had taken the jaw of a chimpanzee and dyed it to make it look ancient, and had then filed its teeth to make them look human. He then submitted his "find" to the British Museum, saying that he had come across it in Piltdown, England. He intended at a later stage to reveal the whole affair as a hoax, in order to make his rival look foolish, but when he saw the seriousness with which his trick had been taken by the entire body of western scientists, he was afraid to own up, and his silence then prevented positive thinking on evolution for several decades. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1984, Piltdown Man.)

The Mummy of Merneptah

One of the most intriguing predictions made by the Quran concerns a Pharaoh of Egypt, called Merneptah, who was the son of Rameses II. According to historical records, this king was drowned in pursuit of Moses in the Red Sea. When the Quran was revealed, the only other mention of Pharaoh was in the Bible, the sole reference to his having drowned being in the book of Exodus; 'And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.'

Amazingly, when this was all the world knew aboul the drowning of Pharaoh, the Quran produced this astounding revelation: 'We shall save you in your body this day, so that you may become a sign to all posterity.'

How extraordinary this verse must have appeared when it was revealed. At that time no one knew that the Pharaoh's body was really intact, and it was nearly 1400 hundred years before this fact came to light. It was a Professor Loret who, in 1898, was the first to find the mummified remains of the Pharaoh who lived in Moses' day. For 3000 years the corpse had remained wrapped in a sheet in the Tomb of the Necropolis at Thebes where Loret had found it, until July 8, 1907, when Elliot Smith uncovered it and subjected it to proper scientific examination. In 1912 he published a book entitled *The Royal Mummies.* His research had proved that the mummy discovered by Loret was indeed that of the Pharaoh who 'knew Moses, resisted his pleas, pursued him as he took flight, and lost his life in the process.' His earthly remains were saved by the will of God from destruction to become a sign to man, as is written in the Quran.

In 1975, Dr. Bucaille made a detailed examination of the Pharaoh's mummy which by then had been taken to Cairo. His findings led him to write in astonishment and acclaim:

> Those who seek among modern data for proof of the Holy Scriptures will find a magnificent illustration of the verses of the Quran dealing with the Pharaoh's body by visiting the Royal Mummies Room of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo!

As early as the seventh century A.D., the Quran had asserted that the Pharaoh's body was preserved as a sign for man, but it was only in the 19th century that the body's discovery gave concrete proof of this prediction. What further proof is needed that the Quran is the Book of God? Certainly, there is no book like it, among the works of men.

Natural Phenomena

The Quran was revealed at a time when little was known about nature. Rainfall, for example, was believed to come from a river in heaven which gushed down on to the earth. The earth was thought to be flat and the heavens a kind of vault resting on the hilltops which provided a roof over the earth. Stars were considered to be shining silver nails set in the vault of heavens or thought of as tiny lamps which were swung to and fro at night by means of a rope. The ancient Indians held that the earth rested upon the horns of a cow and when the cow shifted the earth from one horn to the other, this caused earthquakes. Up till the time of Copernicus (1473–1543 A.D.) it was generally believed that the

earth was stationary and that the sun revolved around it. (Two thousand years earlier, Aristarchus of Samos had anticipated this theory, but his ideas did not gain ground).

With the advances made in the field of science and technology, the range of human observation and experiment were vastly increased, opening up great vistas of knowledge about the universe. In all spheres of existence and in all disciplines of science, previously established concepts were proved wrong by later research and were discarded. This means that no human work dating back 1500 years can boast of total accuracy, because all 'facts' must now be reevaluated in the light of recent information. No such book has, in fact, been found to be totally free of errors, with the notable exception of the Quran, whose authenticity has withstood all challenges over the centuries. This constitutes conclusive evidence of the Quran having had its source in an Omnipresent and Eternal Mind—one which knows all facts in their true forms and whose knowledge has not been conditioned by time and circumstances. Had it been a human fabrication, it could not have withstood the test of time, human vision being, by contrast, narrow and limited.

The basic theme of the Quran is salvation in the life hereafter. That is why it does not fall into the category of any of the known arts and sciences of the world.

But since it addresses itself to man, it touches on almost all the disciplines which concern him. In spite of the breadth of its scope, none of its statements has ever been shown to stem from inadequate knowledge. Bertrand Russell, in his *Impact of Science on Society* makes the point that, renowned philosopher as he was, Aristotle, while 'proving' the inferiority of women to men, stated that 'women have fewer teeth than men,' thus revealing his ignorance of the fact that men and women have an equal number of teeth. No such ignorance or misconception has ever been detected in the Quran. This clearly shows that the origin of this work is a superior Being whose knowledge pre-dates time itself and goes infinitely far beyond present knowledge, no matter how advanced the latter may appear to be.

Examples from Astronomy

Referring to the sun and the moon, the Quran tells us that both these heavenly bodies are moving in their own circular courses (*falak*) (36:40). Dr Maurice Bucaille, discussing these verses in detail, says that *falak* here has the scientific meaning of 'orbit,' while, 'floating' is the most appropriate term to describe the movement of celestial bodies in a vast and subtle space.

Dr Bucaille further writes:

> It is shown that the sun moves in an orbit, but no indication is given as to what this orbit might be in relation to the Earth. At the time of the Quranic Revelation, it was thought that the Sun moved while the Earth stood still. This was the system of geocentrism that had held sway since the time of Ptolemy, in the second century B.C., and was to continue to do so until Copernicus in the sixteenth century A.D. Although people supported this concept at the time of Muhammad, it does not appear anywhere in the Quran, either here or elsewhere (p. 159).

The Development of Biology

An interesting example of the Quran's fore knowledge of biology was highlighted in the press towards the end of 1984. The Canadian newspaper, The Citizen, (22 November,1984) published it under the heading:

> Ancient Holy Book 1300 Years Ahead of its Time.

The Times of India, New Delhi (10 December,1984) stated with equal drama:

> Koran Scores Over Modern Sciences.

This new light on ancient Quranic verses was shed by Dr. Keith More, a famous embryologist and professor at Toronto University, Canada. In order to make a comparative analysis of the assertions of the Quran and the findings of modern research on embryology,

he made an in-depth study of the descriptions of the development of the foetus as given in certain verses such as 23:14 and 39:6. In this connection he also visited the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on several occasions, along with his colleagues. He found, astonishingly, that the statements of the Quran corresponded in every detail with modern discoveries. He was very surprised that facts contained in the Quran had been brought to light by the Western World as late as 1940. In a paper written on this subject, he says: "The 1300 years old Koran contains passages so accurate about embryonic development that Muslims can reasonably believe them to be revelations from God."

Convincing supportive details can be had from the analysis Maurice Bucaille makes in his book, *The Bible, The Quran and Science* which was published in 1970. We reproduce here some excerpts from the chapter entitled 'Human Reproduction.'

Evolution of the Embryo inside the Uterus

The Quranic description of certain stages in the development of the embryo corresponds exactly to what we know about it today, and the Quran does not contain a single statement that is open to criticism from modern science.

After 'the thing which clings' (an expression which

is well-founded, as we have seen) the Quran informs us that the embryo passes through the stage of 'chewed-flesh,' then osseous tissue appears and is clad in flesh (defined by a different word from the preceding which signifies 'intact flesh').

—Surah 23, verse 14:

> "We fashioned the thing which clings into a chewed lump of flesh and We fashioned the chewed flesh into bones and We clothed the bones with intact flesh."

'Chewed flesh' is the translation of the word *mudgha*; 'intact flesh' is *lahm*. This distinction needs to be stressed. The embryo is initially a small mass. At a certain stage in its development, it looks to the naked eye like chewed flesh. The bone structure develops inside this mass in what is called the mesenchyma. The bones that are formed are covered in muscle; the word *lahm* applies to them.

It is known how certain parts appear to be completely out of proportion during embryonic development with what is later to become the individual, while others remain in proportion.

This is surely the meaning of the word *mukhallaq*, which signifies 'shaped in proportion' as used in verse 5, surah 22 to describe this phenomenon.

> "We fashioned ... into something which clings ... into a lump of flesh fashioned and unfashioned."

More than a thousand years before our time, at a period when whimsical doctrines still prevailed, those who were privileged to have a knowledge of the Quran were fortunate, for the statements it contains express in simple terms truths of primordial importance which man has taken centuries to discover.

Origin of the Universe

The Quran says:

> "Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were one solid mass (*ratq*) which we tore asunder (*fatq*) …" (21:30)

Ratq means wholesomeness, compactness, while *fatq* is the opposite, that is, disintegration.

Modern studies in astronomy have confirmed the truth of this concept, various observations having led scientists to postulate that the universe was formed by an explosion from a state of high density and temperature (the '*big-bang*' *theory*) and that the cosmos evolved from the original, highly compressed, extremely hot gas, taking the form of galaxies of stars, cosmic dust, meteorites and asteroids. The present outward motion of the galaxies is a result of this explosion. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), this is 'the theory now favoured by most cosmologists.' Once the process of expansion had set in—about six

billion years ago—it had to continue, because the more the celestial bodies moved away from the centre, the less attraction they exerted over one another. Estimates of the circumference of the original matter place it at about one thousand million light years and now, according to Professor Eddington's calculations, the present circumference is ten times what it was originally. This process of expansion is still going on. Professor Eddington explains that the stars and galaxies are like marks on the surface of a balloon which is continuously expanding, and that all the celestial spheres are getting further and further apart. Ancient man supposed quite wrongly, that the stars were as close to one another as they appeared to be. How significant that the Quran should state in Surah 51, verse 47, 'The heaven, We have built it with power. Truly, We are expanding it.' Now science has revealed that since the universe came into existence 90 thousand million years B.C., its circumference has stretched from 6 thousand to sixty thousand million light years. This means that there are inconceivably vast distances between the celestial bodies. And it has been discovered that they revolve as part of galactic systems, just as our earth and the planets revolve around the sun.

Just as within the Solar System, many planets and asteroids are situated at great distances from each other, yet revolve according to one system, likewise

every material body is composed of innumerable 'Solar Systems' on an infinitesimally small scale. These systems are called atoms. While the vacuum of the Solar System is observable, the vacuum of the atomic system is too small to be visible. All things, however solid they appear, are hollow from the inside. For instance, if all the electrons and protons present within the atoms of a six foot tall man were to be squeezed in such a manner that no space were left, his body would be reduced to such a tiny spot as would be visible only through a microscope.

The farthest galaxy that has been observed is situated several million light years away from the sun. Yet it is held that if the total quantum of cosmic matter as worked out by astrophysicists—and it is enormous—were to be compressed so as to eliminate all space, the size of the universe would be only thirty times the size of the sun. In view of how recently these calculations have been made, it is quite extraordinary that 1500 years ago the Quran asserted that not only had the universe expanded from a condensed form but that its original quantum of matter had remained constant, so that it could conceivably be re-condensed into a relatively small space. It describes the end of the universe thus: "On that day, we shall roll up the heaven like a scroll of writing." (21:104)

The moon is our nearest neighbour, in space, its

distance from the earth being just two lakh and forty thousand miles. Due to this proximity, its gravitational force affects the sea waves, causing an extraordinary rise in the water level twice a day. At certain points these waves rise as high as sixty feet. The land surface too is affected by this lunary pull, but only in terms of a few inches. The present distance between the earth and moon is optimal from man's point of view, there being several advantages. If this distance were reduced, for example, to only fifty thousand miles, the seas would be so stormy that a major part of the earth would be submerged in them and, moreover, the continual impact of the stormy waves would cut the mountains into pieces and the earth's surface, more fully exposed to the moon's gravitation, would start to crack open.

Astronomers estimate that at the time the earth came into existence, the moon was close to it and the surface of the earth had, therefore, been exposed to all kinds of upheavals. In the course of time, the earth and the moon drew apart, to their present distance from one another, according to astronomical laws. Astronomers hold that this distance will be maintained for a billion years, then the same astronomical laws will bring the moon back closer to the earth. As a result of conflicting forces of attraction, the moon will 'burst when close enough and glorify our dead world with rings like those of Saturn.'

This concept bears out the Quran's prediction to a remarkable degree. The following lines, in addition to presenting this phenomenon as a physical fact, explain its religious significance:

> The Hour of Doom is drawing near, and the moon is cleft in two. Yet, when they see a sign, the unbelievers turn their backs and say, 'Ingenious magic'.

The Healing Property of Honey

The Quran tells us about the healing property of honey (16:69). In the light of this verse Muslims attached great importance to the medicinal aspect of honey, and it became an important ingredient in their pharmacology. But the western world remained unaware of its medical value for centuries; they treated it as merely a liquid food, item. It was not before the twentieth century that the European physicians discovered the antiseptic properties of honey.

Here is a summary of modern researches on honey published in an American journal.

Honey is a powerful destroyer of germs which produce human diseases. It was not until the twentieth century, however, that this was demonstrated scientifically. Dr. W.G. Sackett, formerly with the Colorado Agricultural College at Fort Collins, attempted to prove that honey was a carrier of disease much like milk. To his surprise, all the disease germs

he introduced into pure honey were quickly destroyed. The germ that causes typhoid fever died in pure honey after 48 hours' exposure. Enteritidis, causing intestinal inflation, lived 48 hours. A hardy germ which causes bronchopneumonia and septicemia held out for four days. Bacillus coli Communis which under certain conditions causes peritonitis, was dead on the fifth day of experiment. According to Dr. Bodog Beck, there are many other germs equally destructible in honey. The reason for this bactericidal quality in honey, he said, is in its hygroscopic ability. It literally draws every particle of moisture out of germs. Germs, like any other living organism, perish without water. This power to absorb moisture is almost unlimited. Honey will draw moisture from metal, glass, and even stone rocks (*Rosicrucian Digest*, September 1975, p. 11).

Superiority of the Quran

The very language in which it is written—Arabic—is a kind of miracle, being an astonishing exception to the historical rule that a language cannot survive in the same form for more than 500 years. In the course of five centuries, a language changes so radically that the coming generations find it increasingly difficult to understand the works of their distant predecessors. For instance, the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400), the father of English poetry, and the plays and poetry

Of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), one of the greatest writers of the English language, have become almost unintelligible to twentieth century readers, and are now read almost exclusively as part of college curricula with the help of glossaries, dictionaries and 'translations.'

But the history of the Arabic language is strikingly different, having withstood the test of time for no less than 1500 years. Wording and style have, of course, undergone some development, but not to such an extent that words should lose their original meaning. Supposing someone belonging to the Quranic times of ancient Arabia could be reborn today, the form of language in which he would express himself would be as understandable to modern Arabs as it was to his own contemporaries.

It is as if the Quran had placed a divine imprint upon Arabic, arresting it in its course so that it should remain understandable right up to the last day. This being so, the Quran is never just going to collect dust on some obscure 'Classical Literature' shelf, but will be read by, and give inspiration to people for all time to come.

In the field of science, despite the great and rapid advances in knowledge in recent years, we come back to what was asserted in the Quran, so many centuries ago, as having arrived at the quintessence of the matter. Just as the Arabic language seems to have been

crystallized at a particular point in time—in fact, at the moment of divine revelation, so also does science seem to have been arrested in its course, the Quran having the final say on matters which for centuries lay beyond man's knowledge and which still, in many important cases, elude man's intellectual grasp. The most significant of these is the origin of the universe.

Newton's Theory of Light

Another point on which human intelligence appeared to have arrived at a major scientific truth was that of the true nature of light. It was Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) who put forward the theory that light consisted of minute corpuscles in rapid motion, which emanated from their source and were scattered in the atmosphere. Owing to the extraordinary influence of Newton, this corpuscular theory held sway in the scientific world for a very long time, only to be abandoned in the middle of the nineteenth century in favour of the wave theory of light. It was the discovery of the action of the photon which delivered the final blow to Newton's theory. "Young's work convinced scientists that light has essential wave characteristics in apparent contradiction to Newton's corpuscular theory."

It had taken only 200 years to prove Newton wrong. The Quran, on the contrary, gave its message to the world in the 7th century, and even after a lapse of 1400

years its truth emerges unscathed. The reason for this is that it is of divine, not human origin: the absolute truth of its statements can be proved at all times—an extraordinary attribute that no other work can claim.

Einstein's theory of relativity declares that gravity controls the behaviour of planets, stars, galaxies and the universe itself, and does so in a predictable manner.

This scientific discovery had already been developed into a philosophy by Hume (1711-1776) and other thinkers, who declared that the whole system of the universe was governed by the principle of causation, and that it had only been when man had not been aware of this, that God had been supposed to control the universe. The principle of cause and effect was then thought logically to dispense with the idea of God.

But later research ran counter to this purely material supposition. When Paul Dirac, Heisenberg and other eminent scientists bent their minds to analysing the structure of the atom, they discovered that its system contradicted the principle of causation which had been adopted on the basis of studies made of the solar system. This theory, called the quantum mechanics theory, maintains that at the subatomic level, matter behaves randomly.

The word 'principle' in science means something which applies in equal measure throughout the entire universe. If there is even one single instance of a

principle failing to apply to something, its academic bona fides have to be called in question. It followed then that if matter did not function according to this principle of causation in an exactly similar manner at the subatomic level as it did in the solar system, it should have to be rejected.

Einstein found this idea unthinkable and spent the last 30 years of his life trying to reconcile these seeming contradictions of nature. He rejected the randomness of quantum mechanics, saying, "I cannot believe God plays dice with the universe." Despite his best efforts, he was never able to resolve this problem, and it seems that the Quran has the final word on the reality of the universe. The fact that the universe cannot be explained in terms of human knowledge is aptly illustrated by Ian Roxburgh when he writes:

> The laws of physics discovered on earth contain arbitrary numbers, like the ratio of the mass of an electron to the mass of a proton, which is roughly 1840 to one. Why? Did a Creator arbitrarily choose these numbers?

Science seems to recognize the fact that the universe can never be encompassed by human knowledge. The Universe it must be conceded is the awesome manifestation of the will of the Almighty. Hence no true explanation can be arrived at unless it is based on, the concept of the Will of God.

CHAPTER TWO

The Quran: The Prophet's Miracle

Every Prophet is given a miracle—a sign. The miracle of the Prophet of Islam is the Quran. The prophethood of Muhammad, on whom be peace, was to be valid until the Last Day. It was imperative, therefore, that his miracle also be one which would last for all time. The Quran was, therefore, assigned to the Prophet as his everlasting miracle.

The Prophet's opponents demanded miracles, such as those performed by previous prophets, but the Quran stated clearly that such miracles would not be forthcoming (17:59). The Quran even had this to say to the Prophet:

> If you find their aversion hard to bear (and would like to show them a miracle), seek if you can a burrow in the earth or ladder to the sky by which you may bring them a sign. Had God pleased, He would have given them guidance, one and all. Do not be ignorant then. (6:35)

Instead, the revealed Book of God was made into the Prophet's miracle:

> They ask: 'Why has no sign been given him by his Lord?' Say: 'Signs are in the hands of God. My mission is only to give plain warning.' Is it not enough for them that We have revealed to you the Book which is recited to them? Surely in this there is a blessing and an admonition to true believers. (The Quran, 29:50-51)

There are many different aspects of the Quran's miraculous nature. Here we are going to concentrate on just three:

1. The language of the Quran—Arabic—has, unlike other international languages, remained a living form of communication over the ages.

2. The Quran is unique among divine scriptures in that its text has remained intact in the original form.

3. The Quran challenged its doubters to produce a book like it. No one has been able to take up this challenge and produce anything comparable to the Book of God.

The languages in which all the ancient scriptures were revealed have been locked in the archives of history. The only exception is Arabic, the language of the Quran, which is still current in the world today. Millions of people still speak and write the language in which the Quran was revealed nearly 1500 years ago. This provides stunning proof of the miraculous nature

of the Quran, for there is no other book in history which has been able to make such an impact on its language; no other book has moulded a whole language according to its own style, and maintained it in that form over the centuries.

Take the *Injil*, known as the New Testament, of which the oldest existing copy is in Greek and not Aramaic, the language which Jesus is thought to have spoken. That means that we possess only a translated account of what the Prophet Jesus said and did; and that too, in ancient Greek, which is considerably different from the modern language. By the end of the 19th century the Greek language had changed so much that the meaning of at least 550 words in the New Testament—about 12% of the entire text—was not known. At that time a German expert, Adolf Deissman, discovered some ancient scrolls in Egypt. From them it emerged that biblical Greek was in fact a colloquial version of classical Greek. This language was spoken in Palestine during the first century AD. Deissman was able to attach meanings to some of the unknown words, but there are another fifty words whose meanings are still unknown. (*The Gospels and the Jesus of History*, by Xavier Leon-Dufour S.J.)

Ernest Renan (1823-1894) carried out extensive research on Semitic languages. He wrote a book on their vocabularies, in which he had this to say about the

Arabic language:

> "The Arabic language is the most astonishing event of human history. Unknown during the classical period, it suddenly emerged as a complete language. After this, it did not undergo any noticeable changes, so one cannot define for it an early or a late stage. It is just the same today as it was when it first appeared."

In acknowledging this 'astonishing event of human history' Renan, a French orientalist, is in fact acknowledging the miraculous nature of the Quran. It was the Quran's phenomenal literary style which preserved the Arabic language from alteration, such as other languages have undergone. The Christian Jurgi Zaydan (1861-1914) is one of the scholars to have recognized this fact. In a book on Arabic literature he writes:

> "No religious book has had such an impact on the language in which it was written as the Quran has had on Arabic literature."

World languages have changed so much throughout the ages that no expert in any modern language is able to understand its ancient form without the aid of a dictionary. There have been two main causes of language alteration—upheavals in the social order of a nation and the development of a language's literature. Over the centuries these factors have been at work in Arabic, just as in other languages. The difference is that they have

not been able to change the structure of the Arabic language. The Arabic that is spoken today is the same as that which was current in Mecca when the Quran was revealed. Homer's Iliad (850 BC), Tulsi Das' Ramayana (1623 AD), and the dramas of Shakespeare (1564-1616), are considered literary masterpieces of their respective languages. They have been read and, in the case of the Ramayana and Shakespeare's plays, performed continuously from the time of their compilation until the present day. But neither their literary worth nor their form has been able to prevent the languages in which they were written from being altered. The Greek of Homer, the Sanskrit of Tulsi Das and even the English of Shakespeare, are now classical rather than modern languages. The Quran is the only book to have moulded a language and maintained it in that same form over the ages. There have been various intellectual and political unheavals in Arab countries, but the Arabic language has remained as it was when the Quran was revealed. No change in the Arab social order has been able to alter in any way the Arabic tongue. This fact is a clear indication that the Quran came from a supernatural source. One does not have to look any further than the history of the last 1500 years to see the miraculous nature of the Book revealed to Prophet Mohammad.

Social Upheavals

The example of Latin shows how social upheavals affect languages. Though in latter days Italy became the centre of Latin, it was not originally a product of that country. Around the 12th century BC, during the Iron Age, many central European tribes spread out into surrounding regions. Some of them, especially the Alpine tribes, entered Italy and settled in and around Rome. Their own language mixed with the language of Rome, and that was how Latin was formed. In the third century B.C. Lubus Andronicus translated some Greek tales and dramas into Latin, thus making it a literary language. The Roman Empire was established in the first century BC, and Latin became the official language. The strength of Latin was even further reinforced by the spread of Christianity. With the support of religious and political institutions, and backed by social and economic forces, Latin continued to spread until eventually it came to cover almost the whole of ancient Europe. At the time of St. Augustine, Latin was at its peak, and right up to the Middle Ages it was considered the main international language.

The 8th century A.D. was an age of Muslim conquest. The Romans were forced to take refuge in Constantinople, which became the capital of the eastern half of the Empire, until in 1453 the Turks took Constantinople and banished the Romans from this,

their last stronghold. The decline of the Roman Empire enabled various local languages to flourish, notably French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Latin had a strong influence on all of them, being the language from which they were all derived, but itself survived only as the official language of the Roman Catholic Church. No longer a living tongue, it was ultimately only of historical interest, although it did continue to provide the linguistic bases for technical, legal and scientific terms. Without a good grasp of Latin, for instance, one cannot read Newton's *Principia* in the original.

Every classical language followed much the same pattern, changing along with social circumstances until, eventually, the original language gave way to another, completely changed one. Ethnic integration, political revolutions, and cultural clashes have always left a deep imprint on the languages of the affected peoples. These factors have been at work on the Arabic language over the last 1500 years, but amazingly it has remained intact. This extraordinary resilience of the Arabic language is entirely due to the miraculous spell the Quran has cast on it.

After the coming of Islam, Arabs settled in many parts of Africa and Asia where other languages besides Arabic were spoken. Their intermingling with other races, however, did not have any effect on the Arabs' language, which remained in its original state. There are

also instances of other people's changing over to Arabic, such as the Jewish tribes who left Syria in 70 A.D. and settled in Medina where, having come in contact with the Arabic speaking 'Amaliqa tribe, they adopted Arabic as their language, although the Arabic they spoke was different from common Arabic, retaining, a strong Hebrew influence.

In the very first century after the revelation of the Quran, Arabic was exposed to the sort of forces which cause a language to alter radically. This was when Islam spread among various Arab tribes, who began to congregate in major Muslim cities. Intonation and accent varied from tribe to tribe. So much so that Abu 'Amr ibn al-ula was moved to remark that the 'Himyar tribe do not speak our language; their vocabulary is quite different from ours.' 'Umar ibn Khattab once brought before the Prophet an Arab whom he had heard reciting the Quran. The Arab had been pronouncing the words of the Quran in such a strange manner that 'Umar was unable to make out what part of the Book of God he was reading. The Prophet once spoke to a visiting delegation from some Arab tribe in their own dialect. It seemed to 'Ali as if the Prophet was speaking in a foreign tongue.

The main reason for this difference was variation in accent. For instance, the Banu Tameem, who lived in the eastern part of Najd, were unable to say the letter

'j' (Jim) and used to pronounce it as 'y' (Ye) instead. The word for mosque (masjid), they used to pronounce 'masyid', and instead of 'shajarat' (trees), they would say 'sharat'. 'Q' (Qaaf) they pronounced as 'j' (Jim), calling a 'tareeq' (road) a 'tareej,' a 'sadiq' (friend) a 'sadij,' 'qadr' (value) as 'jadr' and 'qasim' (distributor) as 'jasim'. According to normal linguistic patterns, the coming together of tribes who spoke such varying dialects should have initiated a fresh process of change in the Arabic language, but this was not to be. The supreme eloquence of the language of the Quran guarded Arabic from any such transformation. What happened instead has been explained by Dr. Ahmad Hasan Zayyat:

> "After the coming of Islam, the Arabic language did not remain the monopoly of one nation. It became the language of all those who entered the faith."

Then these Arab Muslims left their native land, conquering territory extending from Kashghar in the east to Gibraltar in the west. Persian, Qibti, Berber, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic and Suryani were among the languages spoken by the peoples they came into contact with. Some of these nations were politically and culturally more advanced than the Arabs. Iraq, bastion of an ancient civilization and the cultural centre of major tribes, was one of the countries they entered. They mingled with the Iranians, masters of

one of the world's two great empires. The highly advanced Roman civilization, and an expanding Christian religion, were two of the forces that they clashed with. Among the countries they occupied was Syria, where Phoenician, Ghassanid, Greek, Egyptian and Cana'anian tribes had left behind outstanding traditions in literature and ethics. Then there was Egypt, the meeting place of oriental and occidental philosophy. These factors were more than enough to transform the Arabic language, as had been the case with other tongues exposed to similar forces. But they were rendered ineffective by the Quran, a specimen of such unrivalled literary excellence that no power could weaken the hold of the language in which it had been written.

With the conquests of Islam, Arabic no longer belonged to one people alone; it became the language of several nations and races. When the 'Ajamis, (non-Arabs) of Asia and Africa accepted Islam, they gradually adopted Arabic as their language. Naturally, these new converts were not as proficient in speaking the language as the Arabs of old. Then the Arabs in their turn were affected by the language spoken by their new co-religionists. The deterioration of Arabic was especially evident in large, cosmopolitan cities, where there was more intermingling of races. First it was the rank and file, those who did not pay much attention to the finer points of linguistics, who were affected. But the cultural

elite did not remain immune either. A man once came to the court of Ziyad ibn Umayya and lamented. 'Our fathers have died, leaving small children,' with both 'fathers' and 'children' in the wrong grammatical case. Mistakes of this nature became commonplace, yet the Arabic language remained essentially the same. Shielded by the Quran's supreme eloquence, written Arabic was not corrupted by the degradation of the spoken version. It remained cast in the mould of the Quran.

For proof of the Quran's miraculous nature, one has only to look at all the traumatic experiences that Arabic has been through over the last 1500 years. If it had not been for the protective wing of the Quran, the Arabic language would surely have been altered. The unsurpassable model that was established by the Quran remained the immutable touchstone of standard Arabic.

The fall of the Umayyad dynasty in the second century Hijrah posed a great threat to the Arabic language. The Umayyads had been a purely Arab dynasty. Strong supporters of Arab nationalism, they took their promotion of Arabic literature and language almost to the point of partiality. Their capital was situated in Damascus, in the Arab heartland. In their time, both the military and the civil administration were controlled by Arabs. Now the Abbasids took over

the reins of power. Since it was Iranian support that had brought the caliphate to the Abbasids, it was inevitable that the Iranians should maintain a strong influence on their administration. This influence led to the capital being moved to Baghdad, on the threshold of Persia. The Abbasids gave the Iranians a free hand in affairs of government, but looked down on the Arabs and their civilization, and made conscious efforts to weaken them, unlike the Umayyads who had always preferred Arabs for high posts. With the wane of pro-Arab favouritism, Iranians, Turks, Syrians, Byzantine and Berber elements were able to gain control over all affairs of society and state. Marriages between Arabs and non-Arabs became commonplace. With the mixing of Aryan and Semitic civilizations, Arabic language and culture faced a new crisis. The grandsons of the emperors and lords of Persia arose to resurrect the civilization of their forefathers.

These events had a profound effect on the Arabic language. The state that it had reached by the time of the poet Mutanabbi (915-965 A.D.) is expressed in the following lines:

> "The buildings of Iran excel all others in beauty as the season of spring excels all other seasons. An Arab youth goes amongst them,
> His face, his hands, his tongue, a stranger in their midst.
> Solomon, they say, used to converse with the jinns.

> But were he to visit the Iranians, he would need a translator."
> (Diwan al-Mutanabbi)

It was the Quran's literary greatness alone which kept Arabic from being permanently scarred by these upheavals. The language always returned to its Quranic base, like a ship which, after weathering temporary storms on the high seas, returns to the safety of its harbour.

During the reign of the caliph Mutawakkil (207-247 AH), large numbers of Ajamis—especially Iranians and Turks—entered Arab territory. In 656 the Mongolian warrior Hulaku Khan sacked Baghdad. Later the Islamic empire received a further setback when, in 898, Andalusia fell to the Christians. The Fatimid dynasty, which had held sway in Egypt and Syria, did not last long either: in 923 they were replaced by the Ottoman Turks in large stretches of Arab territory. Now the centre of Islamic government moved from Cairo to Constantinople; the official language became Turkish instead of Arabic, which continued to assimilate a number of foreign words and phrases.

The Arab world spent five hundred and fifty years under the banner of Ajami (non-Arab) kings. Persian, Turkish and Mughal rulers even made attempts to erase all traces of the Arabic language. Arabic libraries were burnt, schools destroyed; scholars of the language found

themselves in disgrace. The Ottoman emperors launched an anti-Arabic campaign, fittingly called "Tatreek 'ul-'Arab" (Turkisation of Arabs) by the well-known reformer Jamaluddin Afghani (1838-97). But no effort was strong enough to inflict any permanent scar on the face of Arabic. Fierce attacks were launched on Arabic language and literature by the Tartars in Bukhara and Baghdad, by the Crusaders in Palestine and Syria, then by other Europeans in Andalusia. According to the history of other languages, these assaults on Arab culture should have been sufficient to eradicate the Arabic language completely. One would have expected Arabic to have followed the path of other languages and merged with other Semitic tongues. Indeed, it would be true to say that if Arabic had not come up against Turkish ignorance and Persian prejudice, it would still be spoken throughout the entire Muslim world today. Its very survival in the Arab world was due solely to the miraculous effect of the Quran whose greatness compelled people to remain attached to Arabic. It inspired some Arab scholars—Ibn Manzoor (630-711 AH) and Ibn Khaldun (732-808 AH) being two that spring to mind—to produce, in defiance of the government of the day, works of great literary and academic excellence.

Napoleon's entry into Cairo (1798) ushered in the age of the printing press in the Middle East. Education

became the order of the day. The Arabic language was invested with new life. Yet the centuries of battering that Arabic had received was bound to leave its mark: instead of pure Arabic, a mixture of Arabic and Turkish had been taken as the official language in Egypt and Syria.

The situation changed again with the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. They opposed Arabic with all their strength, prescribing compulsory English in schools and eliminating other languages from syllabi. The French did the same in areas over which they had gained control. With the colonial powers forcing their subjects to learn their languages, Arabic lived in the shadow of English and French for over one hundred years. Yet it still remained in its original form. Certainly, it assimilated new words—the word "dabbaba" meaning tank, for instance, which had previously been used for a simple battering ram. New styles of writing emerged. If anyone were to write a book about why people adopt Islam today, he might call it. "Li madha aslamna" (Why we accepted Islam), whereas in the old days rhythmical and decorative titles were preferred. Many words were adopted by the Arabic language—the English word "doctor" for example. But such changes were just on the surface. Arabic proper still remained the same as it had been centuries ago, when the Quran was revealed.

Literary Advancement

Once in a while, writers of outstanding status appear on a language's literary scene. When this happens, the language in which they write undergoes some change, for their literary masterpieces influence the mode of popular expression. In this way languages are continually passing through progressive evolutionary stages, until eventually they become quite different from their original form. With Arabic this did not happen. At the very outset of Arabic history, the Quran set a literary standard that could not be excelled. Arabic maintained the style set for it by the Quran. No masterpiece comparable to the Quran was destined to be produced after it; so Arabic remained cast in the mould of that divine symphony.

Take the example of English. In the 7th century A.D., it was just an ordinary local dialect, not geared to the expression of profound intellectual thought. For another five hundred years this situation continued. The Normans conquered England in 1066 and, when the founding father of the English language—Geoffrey Chaucer—was born around 1340, the official language of their court was still French. Chaucer himself had a command of Latin, French and Italian, besides his native English. This, along with his great gifts of scholarship, enabled him to make English into an academic language. To use Ernest Hauser's words,

he gave the English language a 'firm boost' with his Canterbury Tales. Chaucer transformed a dialect into a language, paving the way for fresh progress in times to come.

For two hundred years English writers and poets followed Chaucer's guidelines. When William Shakespeare (1558-1625) appeared on the scene, English took another step forward. His dramas and poems set a new literary standard, enabling English to march further forward. The coming of the scientific age two hundred years later had a tremendous impact on every stratum of society. Language now began to follow the dictates of science. Prose became more popular than poetry, factual expression more effective than story telling. Dozens of poets and writers from Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) to T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) were representative of this trend. They were the makers of the modern age of English literature through which we are now passing.

The same thing happened with other languages. Writers, or groups of writers, kept on emerging who became more popular than their predecessors. Whenever they appeared, they steered the language on a new course. Eventually every language changed so much that it became impossible for a person to understand the ancient form of his own tongue without the aid of dictionaries and commentaries.

There is only one exception to this universal trend, and that is Arabic. The claim of the Quran, that no one would ever be able to write a book like it, has been borne out to the letter. For further proof of this fact, one need only look at the various attempts to produce a work equal to the Quran that have been made over the centuries. All attempts have failed dismally. Musailema ibn Habib, Tulaiha ibn Khuwailid, Nadhr ibn al Harith, Ibn al Rawandi, Abu al Ala al Ma'arri, Ibn al Muqaffa, Al Mutanabbi, and many others, have tried their hand at it, but their efforts, like Musailema's extraordinary reference to 'God's blessing upon pregnant women, extracting from them a sprightly life, from between the stomach and the foetal membrane look ridiculous when compared with the literary majesty of the Quran.

But the greatest substantiation of the Quran's claim that no one would be able to write a work like it (17:88) comes from what Ernest Renan has called the 'linguistic miracle' of the Arabic language. As with every other language, masters of Arabic—great poets and writers—have appeared over the ages. But, in the 1500 years since the Quran was revealed, no one has been able to produce a work that excelled it. Its standard has never been improved upon and Arabic has remained on the course set for it by the Quran. The impact that the Quran has had on Arabic is like

that of a writer who produces a work of unsurpassable literary excellence at the very beginning of a language's history. After such a figure has made his mark, no lesser writer can change the face of the language. The Quran, revealed in the Arabic current at the time was cast in a more elevated literary mould than had ever been seen before or afterwards.

By making vital additions to traditional modes of expression, the Quran opened the way for expansion of the Arabic language. The use of the word 'one' (*ahad*) in the 112th chapter of the Quran, entitled 'Oneness', is a good example. Previously it had been used in the genitive to express 'one of us' for example, or for the 'first day' of the week, Saturday or Yaum al Ahad. It was used for general negations, as in 'Ma Ja'ni ahadun'—'no one came to see me.' But in using *ahad* as an attribute of Almighty God, the Quran put the word to an entirely novel use. The Quran brought many foreign words into Arabic usage, for instance *istabraq* from Persian, *qaswara* from Abyssinian, *sirat* from Greek, '*yamm*' from Syrian, *ghassaq* from Turkish, *qistas* from Latin, '*malakut*' from Armaic and '*kafoor*' from Hindi. The Quran tells us (25:60) that the idolators of Mecca were baffled at the word 'rahman'. They used to say, "What is this 'rahman'?" This is because the word was not Arabic: it has been taken from the Sabean and Hamiri languages. The Christians of Yemen and Abyssinia

used to call God '*rahamnan*'. The Meccans considered the word foreign when it appeared in the Quran in an Arabicized form. They enquired what '*rahman*' meant, being unaware of its linguistic background. Over one hundred non-Arabic words of this nature were used in the Quran, taken from languages as far apart as Persian, Latin, Nabataean, Hebrew, Syrian, Coptic and many others.

Although the Quran was revealed mainly in the language of the Quraysh, words used by other Arab tribes were also included. Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, a Qurayshi Muslim, was puzzled when the word *fatir* appeared in the Quran. "I did not know what the expression 'Originator of the heavens and the earth' meant," he explained. 'Then I heard an Arab saying that he had 'originated' a well, when he had just started digging it, and I knew what the word '*fatir*' meant.' Abu Huraira said that he had never heard the word 'sikkin' until he heard it in the chapter, 'Joseph', of the Quran. "We always used to call a knife '*mudiya*'," he said.

As Jalaluddin Suyuti has pointed out in Al-Itqan, many words were pronounced differently by various Arab tribes. The Quran took some of these words and used them in their most refined literary form. The Quraysh, for instance, used the word *a'ata* for 'he gave', while the Himyaris used to pronounce it 'anta'. The Quran preferred *a'ata to anta*. Likewise, it chose '*asabi*'

rather than *shanatir* and *dhi'b* instead of *kata*. The general trend of preferring Qurayshi forms was sometimes reversed, as in the phrase 'layalitkum min a'amalikum'—'nothing will be taken away from your actions'—which was borrowed from the Bani' Abbas dialect.

In giving old Arabic words and expressions new depth and beauty, the Quran set a standard of literary excellence which no future writer could improve on. It revised certain metaphors, rephrasing them in a more eloquent form than had been heard before. This was how an ancient Arab poet described the impermanence of the world:

> "Even if he enjoys a long period of secure life, every mother's son will finally be carried aloft in a coffin."

The Quran put the same idea in the poignantly succinct words: 'Every soul shall taste death' (3:185). Killing and plundering presented a major problem in ancient Arabia. Certain phrases had been coined to express the idea that only killing could put an end to killing, and these were considered highly eloquent in pre-Islamic days. 'To kill some is to give life to the whole,' one of them went. 'Kill more, so that there should be less killing,' and 'Killing puts an end to killing,' were some other examples. The Quran expressed the idea in these words: 'In retaliation there is life for you, O men of understanding.' (2: 179).

In pre-Quranic days, poetry held an important

place in Arabic, as in other languages of the world. Poetical expression of ideas was given pride of place in the literary arena. The Quran, however, left this beaten track, and used prose instead of poetry. This in itself is proof that the Quran came from God, for in the 7th century AD who, save God—who knows the future just as He knows the past—could know that prose rather than poetry should be chosen as the medium for divine scripture that was to last for all time. The Quran was addressed to future generations, and soon poetry was going to become less important as a mass medium of communication. Rhetorical language was also very much in vogue before the Quran, but for the first time in literary history, the Quran introduced a factual rather than a rhetorical style. The most famous topics for literary treatment had previously been military and romantic exploits. The Quran, on the contrary, featured a much wider spectrum, including matters of ethical, legal, scientific, psychological, economic, political and historic significance within its scope. In ancient times, parables were a popular mode of expression. Here too, the Quran trod new ground, adopting a more direct method of saying things. The method of reasoning employed in the Quran was also considerably different from that used in pre-Quranic times. Whereas purely theoretical, analogical proof was all that the world had known prior to this, the Quran introduced empirical,

scientific reasoning. And to crown all its achievements, the Quran expressed all this in a refined literary style, which proved imperishable in times to come.

There was an ancient Arab saying that 'the sweetest poem was the one with the most lies.' The Quran changed this, introducing a new mode of 'articulate speech' (55:4) based on verifiable facts rather than on hypothetical fables. Now Arabic followed the Quran's lead. Pre-lslamic Arabic literature was collected and compiled, keeping the preservation and understanding of the language of the Quran in mind. Great departments of learning, facilitating understanding of the Quran and explaining its orders and prohibitions came into existence. The learning of Arabic grammar, syntax and etymology, Islamic theology and traditions, as well as Quranic studies, were all aimed at helping us to understand the message of the Quran. Even the subjects of history and geography were originally taken up as part of the Arabs' attempt to understand and practice the teachings of the Quran. There is no other example in the history of the world of any single book having such an enormous impact on a people and their language.

Through its development and improvement of the Arabic language, the Quran became a superb literary masterpiece. Anyone who knows Arabic can appreciate the unique quality of the Quran's style as compared to

that of any other work of Arabic literature. The Quran is written in a divine style vastly superior to anything humans can aspire to. We will close this chapter by relating a story which clearly portrays the difference between the work of God and that of man. It is taken from Sheikh Tantawi's commentary of the Quran, *Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Karim*.

'On 13 June 1932,' Tantawi writes, 'I met an Egyptian writer, Kamil Gilani, who told me an amazing story. One day he was with an American Orientalist by the name of Finkle, with whom he enjoyed a deep intellectual relationship. 'Tell me, are you still among those who consider the Quran a miracle?' whispered Finkle in Gilani's ear, adding a laugh to indicate his ridicule of such belief. He thought that Muslims could only hold this belief in blind faith. It could not be based on any sound, objective reasoning. Thinking that his blow had really gone home, Finkle was visibly pleased with himself. Seeing his attitude, Gilani too started laughing. 'Before issuing any pronouncement on the style of the Quran,' he said, 'We should first have a look and see if we can produce anything comparable to it. Only when we have tried our hand, shall we be able to say conclusively whether humans can produce anything comparable to the Quran or not.'

Gilani then invited Finkle to join him in putting a Quranic idea into Arabic words. The idea he chose was:

Hell is extremely vast. Finkle agreed, and both men sat down with pen and paper. Between them, they produced about twenty Arabic sentences. 'Hell is extremely vast,' 'Hell is vaster than you can imagine,' 'Man's intellect cannot fathom the vastness of Hell,' and many examples of this nature, were some of the sentences they produced. They tried until they could think of no other sentence to express this idea. Gilani looked at Finkle triumphantly. 'Now that we have done our best, we shall be able to see how the Quran stands above all works of men,' he said. 'What, has the Quran expressed this idea more eloquently?' Finkle enquired. 'We are like little children compared to the Quran,' Gilani told him. Amazed, Finkle asked what was in the Quran. Gilani recited this verse from Surah *Qaf*: 'On that Day We will ask Hell: 'Are you full?' And Hell will answer: 'Are there any more?' (50:30) Finkle was startled on hearing this verse. Amazed at the supreme eloquence of the Quran, he openly admitted defeat. 'You were right, quite right,' he said, 'I unreservedly concede defeat.' 'For you to acknowledge the truth,' Gilani replied, 'is nothing strange, for you are a man of letters, well aware of the importance of style in language.' This particular Orientalist was fluent in English, German, Hebrew and Arabic, and had spent all his life studying the literature of these languages. (Sheikh al-Tantawi al-Jauhari, *Al-Jawahir fi Tafseer AI-Quran AI-Kareem*, Vol. 23, pp. 111-12).

CHAPTER THREE

The Quran: The Voice of God

Recently I have been studying Marxism in considerable detail and have formed the impression that Marx was a man of extraordinary intellect and spirit; few men of such talent can have appeared in the annals of history. Yet, when he gave his mind to the improvement of the human condition, the remedies he offered were unparalleled in their foolishness. Why should this have been so? The principal reason is that he had made no study of the Quran. He had not gone to that great source of knowledge, without which no sound and definite opinion can be arrived at on the vicissitudes of human existence. It must be conceded that the universe is a mystery and that the only book which can unveil that mystery for us is the Quran. No mere mortal can solve the mysteries of life and the universe without the revelations of the Book of God.

Medicines are accompanied by leaflets explaining what illnesses they are designed to cure, how they

should be used and what their basic formulae are. But man is born into the world in such a condition that he knows neither what he is nor why he has been put here. No convenient handbook accompanies him, neither are there any signboards fixed to the summits of the mountains to give him directions or to provide him with answers to his questions. Man has, in consequence, formed strange opinions about himself, the earth and the sky, being ignorant of the essential reality of life. When he examines his own being, it appears to him as an amazing accumulation of intellectual and physical powers. Yet, he did not will himself into being, nor did he play any part in the making of himself. Then he looks at the world outside himself and a universe of such extreme vastness, that he can neither encompass nor traverse it, nor can he count the innumerable treasures it contains. What is all this, and why is it there? Where did this world start from and where will it all end? What is the purpose of all this existence? He finds himself completely in the dark on these subjects. Man has, of course, been given eyes, but all his eyes can do is see the outside of things. He has intelligence, but the trouble with human intelligence is that it does not even know about itself. Up till now, man has been unable to find out how thoughts enter the human mind or how the mind functions. With such inadequate faculties, he is neither able to arrive at any sound conclusion

concerning himself, nor he is able to understand the Universe.

This riddle is solved by the Book of God. Today, the Quran is the only scripture beneath the heavens about which we can say with complete conviction that it gives us definite knowledge concerning all the realities of life.

Those who have tried to understand the Universe without recourse to the Book of God are just like those blind people who try to find out what an elephant is by touching different parts of its body. One will touch its leg and think he has found a pillar. Another will feel its ear, and think it is a winnowing basket. Its back will be proclaimed a platform, its tail a snake and its trunk a hosepipe. But where in all this is the elephant? No matter how these blind people put together their findings, they cannot arrive at the correct answer. This is the eternal predicament of all atheist philosophers and thinkers. In their attempt to fathom the nature of reality in the universe, they have failed to be guided by true knowledge. As a result, their conclusions have been like those of a man, fumbling in the dark, and just hazarding wild guesses as to the nature of his surroundings, without ever truly understanding it.

There have been people in this world who have devoted their entire lives to the quest for Truth, but who, in their desperation at being unable to find it,

have even taken the extreme step of putting an end to their lives. And then there have been others who sought the Truth but who, having failed to find it, settled for a concocted philosophy based on pure conjecture. While the latter, mistaking conjecture for reason, compiled their conclusions and presented them to the world as Truth, the former saw speculation for what it was, rejected it, then—anguished at their own ultimate helplessness—opted out of this mysterious world.

Both groups were denied True Knowledge, for, in reality, no one can understand the secret of life without the help of the original Keeper of the Secret. True, man has been given the capacity to think and understand. But this capacity is little better than an eye which can see only so long as there is some external source of light. In pitch darkness, this self-same eye cannot see anything whatsoever. Only when a light is switched on, does everything become clearly visible. The human intellect, like the eye, needs the light—the light of God's revelation—if it is not forever to grope in the dark. Without God's revelation, we can never arrive at the truth of things.

A scholarly acquaintance of mine once remarked that learning—so it is held—is not acquired by reading book after book and possessing a string of degrees from colleges and universities, but consists, in its supreme form, of faith. The Quran likewise states that, 'in fact,

it is those who fear God who are learned.' But he failed to grasp the significance of this, he said. I replied, "Karl Marx is considered a 'prophet' in the field of economics, but he did not have one whit of the True Knowledge which, today, by the grace of God, you possess." Faced by a world in which a small number of feudal lords and industrial magnates had taken possession of a disproportionate share of the available wealth, while most people lived in abject poverty, Marx concluded that what lay at the root of these disparities was the present system of ownership which caused articles to be produced, not for their utility to the producer, but for the profit they would yield when sold to others. This permitted the privileged few to behave as plunderers, heaping up profits and increasing their own property to the detriment of their fellow men. The remedy proposed by Marx was to abolish ownership rights altogether, and to transfer the means of accumulating wealth to the public sector. The government was then to be entrusted with the organization of a public system of creation and distribution of wealth which should serve the interests of all.

At that particular point in time, it was those who possessed the necessary capital who were in a position to profiteer. The question now arose as to the actual advantage of having the government take complete control of these funds in order to turn them into a public

treasury. Would not this new group of people—the members of government—be tempted, as individuals, to do the same as their capitalist predecessors, considering that they would also be vested with military and legislative powers? Karl Marx's analysis was that the system of ownership was flawed by jealousy and the opportunities it gave for outright plunder. According to him, such social defects would disappear in a communist society. 'Now, tell me,' I asked my friend, 'Was Karl Marx correct in thinking so?' 'Certainly not,' he replied, 'The idea of accountability in the Hereafter is the only thing in this world that can cleanse a man of cruel and selfish tendencies.' 'That is the real answer to the problem,' I said. 'For Karl Marx's self-made theory resulted in even greater oppression and cruelty than in the days when political and economic powers were shared by the Czars and the capitalists. Now, under the communist system, the powers of Czars and capitalists have all been rolled into one, and it is the common man who suffers.'

All those philosophers who have attempted—without God—to solve the riddle of the Universe have fallen into the same pitfalls as Marx. As to their thinking, one is struck by how such great intellects could produce such infantile suggestions. They are like so many blind people, trying, gropingly, to identify an elephant and declaring, with finality, that it is four

pillars, or four tree trunks. It is only when life and the universe are scrutinized in the light of the Book of God that everything appears clearly in its true form; then even a person of very average ability has no trouble in understanding the truth of things; at the very first glance, he goes straight to the heart of the matter. To a person who does not possess this Knowledge, however, the universe is but a labyrinth in which he wanders, lost and distraught.

We owe much to the human sciences. Yet the absolute maximum that we can learn from them is *what* the universe is. Till now, they have not given us one iota of knowledge on the subject of *why* the universe is as it is. Bring together a few gases, minerals and salts, and you have a moving, conscious human being. Put seeds in the ground and up spring plants and trees. Just make a change in atomic numbers and innumerable elements come into being. From just two gases, water—that most precious of commodities—is prepared. Steam, produced by molecular motion within water, gives inanimate engines the power to move. The electrons within an atom are too tiny to be seen through a microscope, but they too are a vital source of colossal, mountain-shattering power. These are all matters of fact. Scientific events do take place as described. But this *description* is the *outer limit* of our scientific 'knowledge.' When we ask why things are

as they are, and why things happen as they do, human science gives us no guidance whatsoever.

Studies in astronomy show that the number of stars in the sky is as numerous as all of the sand grains on all the sea-shores of our planet, many of the stars being vastly greater in size than our earth, some even being of such enormous girth that they could accommodate hundreds of thousands of earths inside them and still have room to spare. A few of them are even big enough to contain millions and millions of earths. The universe is so vast that an aeroplane flying at the greatest speed imaginable, i.e., at the speed of light, (186,282 miles per second) would take about ten billion years to complete just a single trip around the whole universe. Even with such a huge circumference, this universe is not static, but is expanding every moment in all directions. So rapid is this expansion that, according to an estimate by Eddington, every 1300 million years, all the distances in this universe are doubled. This means that even our imaginary aeroplane travelling at the speed of light would not ever be able to fly all the way around the universe, because it would never be able, to catch up with this unending expansion. This estimation of the vastness of the universe is based on Einstein's theory of relativity. But this is just a mathematician's guess. To tell the truth, man has yet to comprehend the vastness of the universe.

Human studies bring us face to face with this astonishing universe. And there they leave us. They do not tell us the true meaning of the universe. They do not tell us who causes events to take place. Neither do they tell us whose hand it is that controls the great spheres revolving in the vastness of space. If we wish to have the answers to these questions, it is to the Quran that we must turn. If we want to know how things came into existence, how they are sustained and what their future will be, it is the Quran alone which will tell us. In so doing, it will acquaint us with the Lord and Master of the Universe, opening out before us the sublime nature of His works.

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force at work throughout the entire world, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities which elude the hand and the eye. Not only does it spell out the facts of existence, but it also builds up an astonishing gallery of word-pictures which bring a hitherto unseen world before our very eyes.

The Holy Book not only tells us that God exists, but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the Universe. Not only does it tell us about the Hereafter but describes the Day of Judgement so graphically that its horrors become deeply

etched on our consciousness. There is a well, known story of a Greek artist who painted such a realistic picture of a bunch of grapes that birds would come and peck at it. Just think that if a painting executed by an ordinary mortal could have such an extraordinary effect, what heights of consummate artistry could not be reached by the Lord of the Worlds in His creation of the Quran? Could any mere mortal truly appreciate the perfection of such art?

The Quran opens with the words: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.' This invocation is of great significance. It means: 'Thanks be to God, Maker and Sustainer of all creatures in the world.' A master and sustainer is one who is filled with profound concern for his subjects and provides for all their needs. Man's greatest need is to know what he is, where he has come from, and where he will go. He also needs to know where he will gain and where he will lose. If he were to be taken to some region of space in which there was neither air nor water, this would not be such a great calamity for him as finding himself in the world without any accurate knowledge of his origin or ultimate fate.

God has more compassion for His creatures than a father has for his own son. It is inconceivable, therefore, that He should have seen this need on the part of His servants and not provided for it. By means of revelation, He has sent down whatever knowledge

a man must have in order to understand himself, and He has sent it in a form which could be conveyed by the human tongue. This is the greatest favour that the Lord has done His servants.

A man who realizes to what extent he needs his Maker's help in acquiring True Knowledge will feel his heart simply overflowing with gratitude to and praise for his Lord, when he sees what favour He has shown him in sending him the Quran; The words: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!' will spontaneously burst forth from him. These are the words of a true servant of God having been inspired in him by God Himself. Even when it is a question of how a man should serve his Lord, he needs the guidance of his Maker. The desire to serve may itself be quite instinctive, but the would-be devotee does not know in what manner to give expression to it. The Quran, however, is explicit on this subject, and even provides him with the exact words he should use. In this respect, the prayers of the Quran are the most sublime gifts.

The Quran is not a book in the ordinary, accepted sense of the word. It is more an account of the final struggle to convey the message of Islam. From the most ancient times, God has been sending down knowledge of the truth through His specially chosen emissaries. In the seventh century of the Christian era, it was God's will that the inhabitants of the Earth should

quite finally be provided with Knowledge of Truth and that a society should be founded on the basis of that Knowledge which would be a source of enlightenment and an example for the whole human race until the Last Day.

In accordance with this aim, God raised His final Prophet in Arabia, and charged him with the mission of propagating this message among the Arabs. Those who came under the influence of his preaching were then set the task of spreading the message throughout the whole world. In spreading True Knowledge, and in establishing a society based upon it, the Holy Prophet was working under divine guidance. God sent His Word down to the Prophet, revealing to him what he should preach, and providing him with the proofs he required to make his preaching effective. When his opponents raised objections, he was, therefore, able to give them answers which silenced them. And when those who accepted the message later showed some weakness, he was able immediately to bring them to book to reform them.

Moreover, the Quran formulated rules for war and peace, and laid down principles for education and guidance. It gave solace to its adherents in times of adversity and, when they ultimately triumphed, it provided the legal framework on which society could be built anew. Twenty-three years elapsed between the

beginning and the conclusion. At every stage during this period Almighty God, Light of the World, sent guidance in the form of commandments for mankind. These guidelines were later compiled, in accordance with His plan, in a particular sequence. It is this collection which is called the Quran.

The Quran is the most authentic record of the True Call, raised in Arabia by the Final Prophet, who was guided right throughout his prophethood by God Himself. It is a collection of divine instructions, issued for the guidance of this movement at different times over nearly a quarter of a century. But the Quran is not merely a historical record. It is a divine proclamation, valid for all time, and cast in historical mould in order to be presented meaningfully to mankind. It is also a permanent proclamation in that it will decide the fate—good or bad—of human beings in every epoch, in accordance with the will of God.

The various parts of the Quran were separately conveyed over a long period of time, depending upon local exigencies. These different portions did not, therefore, come into existence as a mere matter of chance. They were parts of a well-ordered scheme—perfect in its conception—which had its origin in the supernatural world. Because they were sent down as circumstances demanded, they were not originally in any regular sequence. But when the scheme reached its

conclusion, it was brought together as a complete whole, according to a definite pattern, which is unrivalled in its consistency. In that way, it is distinctly different from the type of anthology which presents selections of the speeches made by the political leaders of the day.

We can perhaps have a clearer picture of how the Quran was assembled if we imagine the parallel of a factory under construction in India, for which the equipment is being manufactured in some country overseas.

This equipment for the factory has to be manufactured in separate parts in different production units. These parts have then to be loaded on to different ships and sent off to India. Throughout the various stages of its construction, our factory will necessarily appear to the uninitiated as a mass of heterogenous and incomplete objects. But as soon as all the parts of the equipment brought in different shipments are properly assembled, they will take on the shape of a complete factory, all ready to be put into commission. It was in very much the same way that the Quran was assembled in order to produce a complete and permanent moral code for all human beings. That is why, although formed of such disparate elements, it is of such astounding uniformity. It was because it bore a message urging man to turn a hostile environment into a favourable one that it had to be revealed in a gradual manner,

thus meeting the needs of differing circumstances. Historically speaking, it is a compilation of a great diversity of injunctions, but the divine scheme of an Omnipotent and Omniscient God has made it into a well-ordered and uniform whole.

So many books have been written on all branches of learning and on every conceivable allied subject—to date, millions of books have been printed and published—that it would take more than one's entire lifetime to read them all. But the Quran is a book of such a kind that, even if one could study all the books in the world, its guidance would still be a prime necessity. Indeed, one can only truly benefit from the study of other books if one has first gained from the Quran that depth of insight which is at the basis of genuine discernment in all matters of importance. Without the Quran, the human individual is like a ship adrift on a vast ocean without a compass. Just as the ocean liner is lost without its compass, so does man need divine revelation to steer him through the entanglements of human existence. Only one who has received his share of divine light will be able to navigate his way across the ocean of this life.

Those who are denied, or who have denied themselves God's enlightenment, will be roughly tossed on the seas of life and are likely to founder on hidden reefs without ever having been able to bring

their affairs to a satisfactory conclusion.

The Quran fills that vacuum in human nature which, in all periods of history, has set man at variance with himself. Rousseau said that man was born free, but that everywhere he found 'him tied up in chains.' I would say, on the contrary, that man has been born a slave, but seeks, in unnatural ways, to make himself a master. Outwardly, man appears to be self-sufficient, but in his innermost self, he is a complex web of needs. In order merely to survive, man needs air, water and the produce of the land. In the same way, in order to sustain the life of the spirit, he stands in need of external support. Man instinctively requires a prop on which he can lean in times of difficulty; he needs one, close to himself, to whom he can bow his head in reverence; one to whom he can address his needs when he is in trouble; one before whom he can prostrate himself in gratitude when happiness comes his way. A man drowning in the ocean needs to have a lifeline thrown to him. Similarly, a man, adrift in a vast and fathomless universe, needs a spiritual rope to which he can cling. No one, however great, is free of this necessity. It is a vacuum which must be filled. If we fill this vacuum with the Divine Being, we are following the principle of monotheism. But if we abandon God and look to some other for support, we descend into polytheism.

In every period of history, man has been forced to

have recourse to one or other of these two props. In ancient times, those who subscribed to monotheism depended on one God for support and, today, they still depend upon Him and Him alone. But the direction of those who subscribe to polytheism has kept changing. Ancient man, and many people, even in more recent times, worshipped countless objects, ranging from the bright stars that shine in the sky to trees and stones and other randomly chosen objects. Today, objects such as nation, country, material progress, political power have taken the place of earlier objects of worship. Such then are the people's gods, fashioned by them specifically to fill the aching void in their hearts. But even with all this, people still need an ultimate destination in life's struggle which will transcend the plane of pure materialism. They still need someone or something to love. They still yearn for one in whose remembrance they can warm their hearts and revitalize their spirits. But just as idols made of stone have never given any true support or help in the past, neither do the more resplendent idols of today, for, fragile and ephemeral as they are, they do not give a nation any real strength.

The Germans, for example, idolized their nation, but far from standing by them, it brought them to the point of destruction in World War II. Italy and Japan did likewise, but their respective idols could not save their countries from becoming the graveyards of the

people. Britain and France also made idols of their material resources, but even then, the empires of both countries rapidly shrank, the sun finally setting on the British Empire, an empire on which it was said 'the sun never set.'

The Quran shows us where strength in this world really lies, giving us a handhold on a rope that never breaks. Without this, we have no real support in life. Moreover, it is only through our attachment to God that human beings can retain their hold on the cord that binds each to each.

The Quran explains that it is this One God alone who sustains us throughout our lives here on this earth. Through Him our hearts are set at ease, for it is He who provides true warmth in life. He rescues us in times of peril, assists us in the hour of need. All power rests in His hands: honour and glory will be the rewards of any nation who looks to Him for support, while only disgrace and humiliation will be the lot of those who abandon Him. To know this is to hold the key to all the treasures in life. He who possesses this key, gains all; he who loses it, loses all.

We attach great importance to the scientists who discovered electric and steam power, thus providing human civilization with opportunities for progress. But the greatness of the reality which this Book lays before us is immeasurable. It does not just give us

knowledge of machines, but of the human beings for whom all these machines have been made. It tells us of Man, and Man in turn learns from it the secret of successful living.

The Quran, first and foremost, is the Proclamation of God. Just as every enlightened sovereign has a Constitution, so is the Quran the 'Constitution' of the Almighty, Master of Man, King of kings. To put it very simply, the Quran is a book of directions, showing man the right path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps, giving him timely reminders of God's will, awakening his sleeping nature and conveying the Lord's admonition. It is a book that, in giving him the moral sense to distinguish right from wrong, cures him and his society, of all ills. In that sense, it is a book of wisdom, full of every expression of correct understanding. More, it is a book of laws, laying down for us the very foundations on which to build and organize society. In short, it provides everything that man-as an individual and as member of society—can ever need. Without this, man can never be the gainer, no matter how hard he tries.

How can a man gauge whether he has actually developed a relationship with God or not? There is only one answer to this question: by turning his eyes inward and judging how his inner self stands related to the Quran. For how one relates to the Quran is a true reflection of one's relationship with God. The degree to

which a man adheres to the tenets of the Quran will be a sure indication of his attachment to his Maker. If the Quran is the book he values most, it goes without saying that God is dearer to him than any other. But if some other book is held in greater esteem by him, then the most important person in his life will be its author, and not his Maker. Just as it is impossible to find the true God anywhere but in the Quran, so is it impossible that, after finding God, any book other than the Quran should be more precious to him. For the Quran is the book of God. It is the means through which the Almighty converses with His servants, His living representative on this earth. It is a scale on which man's devotion to his Creator may be measured.

When man fears to stand alone, without support, in an unfathomable universe, the Quran sets his mind at rest by making his destination clear to him and directing him towards it. In the Quran man thus meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. In this way, the Quran fills a man with sufficient conviction to define his place in the world. Giving concrete form to the instinctive feelings which swirl in man's subconscious about his Lord and Master, the Quran sets his feet well and truly on the path of submission to Him. In so doing, it brings him closer to God.

In seeking to ascertain God's will, just to read

through the Quran is not enough: one has rather to become deeply engrossed in it. It is only when one has formed a strong degree of attachment to the Quran that one has access to all the advantages it offers. One has to be bound to the Quran as one is by a contract—*ta'ahud* (the word used by the Prophet) in order to reap its benefits. This awareness of the greatness of the Quran, and consequent adherence thereto, cannot come about at second hand. That is, one may hear a commentator or man of letters discourse upon the Quran and may form a high opinion of the speaker and his attainments, but that is not the way to form a genuine attachment with the Quran itself. A real bond with the Quran can be forged only if one reads the Holy Scriptures oneself, thus having direct access to the contents. Only then will its wisdom be engraved upon one's memory. Only then will it be appreciated for what it actually is.

This is not a mere figment of the imagination. It is supported by basic psychology. For example, it may be contended that the difference between cotton wool and stone is merely relative, that, in fact, they are the same thing, both in the last analysis being accumulations of the same kind of electrons. But this contention is purely academic. In the real world, cotton cannot be thought of as anything but soft, and stone as anything but hard. It is not superficial or abstract definitions

which determine the impression one shall have of the matter at hand, but the knowledge that one gains of it by direct, personal experience.

PART TWO

Safeguarding of the Quran

CHAPTER ONE

The Preservation of the Quran

The very first injunction given to the Prophet–'Read in the name of your Lord who created', stresses the importance of knowledge (96:1). And the last words of revelation pertain to the life hereafter (2:281).

The Quran was revealed over a period of twenty-three years and was written down in its entirety during the Prophet's lifetime, although the verses were not gathered together in one volume at that time. (AI-Katani, V.2, p.384)

For the first twenty-three years the Prophet himself was the fountainhead of Quranic learning. Then he appointed certain of his followers to convey the message of the Quran after him. These were men who, having memorized the entire Quranic text with complete accuracy, were fully competent to impart its teachings. During the caliphate of Umar Faruq, the second caliph of Islam, a man who had come from Kufa to Madina told the caliph that there was someone in Kufa who was

teaching the scriptures from memory. At this Caliph Umar was enraged. But when he found out that the person was none other than Abdullah ibn Masood, he regained his composure, (Istiab, Vol. I, p. 377) the reason being that Abdullah ibn Masood was one of those appointed by the Prophet himself to perform this service. Other more prominent scholars of the Quran were as follows: Usman, Ali, Ubayy ibn Kaab, Zayd ibn Thabit, Ibn Masood, Abu Darda, Abu Moosa Ashari, Salim Maula Abi Huzayfa.

However, these Muslims, who had been assigned this task, could not survive forever. Undoubtedly, they were going to leave the world one by one, and then there would be the risk of the Quran falling into the hands of less responsible, less knowledgeable people, who might not preserve it intact and who would almost certainly differ as to its true meaning. There was even the danger of its being entirely lost to posterity. With the death of 700 of the Prophet's Companions in the Battle of Yamamah in 12 A.H., this danger began to loom large.

It has been recorded in the annals of history that "when Salim Maula Abi Huzayfa was martyred, Umar felt the danger of the Quran being destroyed and came to Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, to discuss this" (Fathul Bari, v. 9, p. 5). Salim was one of the few surviving companions who had been selected by the Prophet himself to spread

the teachings of the Quran. The solution suggested by Umar to Abu Bakr was to preserve the Quran by making a formal compilation of it in written form.

As has been established, the Prophet always arranged for each passage of the Quran to be recorded in writing as soon as it was revealed. This *kitabat* (writing down on paper) was so meticulous a procedure that after verse 95 of chapter 4 had been revealed, and the words "except those who are disabled" were revealed again as an addition to the same verse, it was arranged that this phrase—according to Imam, Malik—be written at the same moment by the transcriber. (*Durr Mansoor*, Vol. 2, p.203)

It was customary for the Prophet to ask the transcriber to read out the verses after writing them down. According to Zayd ibn Thabit, if any part was missed out in the writing, he would correct it and only after this written work was fully completed would the Prophet allow the propagation of those verses. (*Majmauz Zawaid*, vol. I, p.60)

The number of transcribers who worked at different times is put at forty-two. According to Ibn Abdul Bar, Hanzala ibn Rabi was the chief transcriber. He was asked to remain in the company of the Prophet at all times (*Aqd AI-Farid*, v. 4, p. 114), a foolproof arrangement whereby a number of the companions

possessed passages of the Quran in written form by the time of the Prophet's death. A sizeable number, four of whom are worth mentioning: Abu Darda, Muaz ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thabit and Abu Zayd even possessed the complete Quran in its present arrangement.

It has been established from authentic traditions that the angel Gabriel, who conveyed the revelations of God to the Prophet, himself arranged these verses: each year during the month of Ramadan, Gabriel would come to the Prophet and recite before him all the Quranic verses revealed up till that time in the order in which they exist today, after which the Prophet would repeat the verses in exactly the same order. This dual process has been termed *al-Irza*, 'mutual presentation,' in the books of hadith.

It has also been established that in the last year of the Prophet's life, when the revelations had been completed, Gabriel came to the Prophet and recited the entire Quran in the existing order twice, and similarly the Prophet also recited to Gabriel the entire Quran twice. This final presentation is called *al-Arz al-Akhirah* in the books of hadith. (*Fathul Bari*, p. 659-663)

When with the help of Gabriel, the Quran was fully and systematically arranged, the Prophet recited it to his companions on different occasions in the order with which we are familiar today. The Quran was thus

preserved in its pristine form in the memories of tens of thousands of the companions during the Prophet's lifetime.

The preservation of the Quran passed through three stages: transcription, compilation and collection. In the first stage, as soon as a chapter or a verse was revealed, it was committed to writing. The following items are mentioned in books as examples of the writing materials used:

Riqa'a—Thin leather piece

Likhaf—Thin slates of white stone

Katf—The round bone of the shoulder of the camel

'Asib—The wide part of the root of the date branch.

In the hadith, the second stage of this process is referred to as "compilation." That is, first the verses were written down at the time of revelation. Then, when one chapter was completed, the whole chapter (often it took several revelations to complete one chapter) was written in compiled form, i.e. arranged in proper order on *riqa'a* (leather). Such copies of the compiled Quran (complete or incomplete) were in the possession of a large number of people during the lifetime of the Prophet. We have the well-known incident of Umar who beat his own sister and brother-in-law mercilessly for having accepted Islam. Finally, when his anger had

subsided, he asked them to show him the book they were reading from. His sister replied that he could not touch it in a state of impurity and only after he had bathed himself did his sister give him the book (Ibn Hisham).

The third stage of this process is termed "Collection", that is, writing down the entire Quran together in one volume. The form of the bound volume consisting of pages of the same size was not prevalent in the Prophet's time. According to a narration recorded by Bukhari, only four companions Ubayy ibn Kaab, Muadh ibn Jabal, Abu Zayd, and Zayd ibn Thabit had the entire Quran put together during the life of the Prophet. In *Kanz al Ummal*, referring to Muhammad, Ibn Kab AI-Qurzi gives us the names of five such collectors of the complete Quran. However, the status of their collections was that of a personal possession. The official version was produced under the direction of the caliph Abu Bakr, who had it bound after arranging for all the verses to be written on square papers of the same size. Imam Malik has also recorded (citing as his source, Shahab Zahri, who had learned it from Salim, son of Abdullah ibn Umar) that Zayd ibn Thabit wrote down all the verses of the Quran on *al-Qaratis* (papers of the same size) at the command of Abu Bakr. This volume was called *Raba'a* (square). (*Itqan*, v. 1, pp. 84-85)

It is said that during the caliphate of Umar Faruq

there were more than one lakh copies of the Quran in circulation in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, etc.

In later times the written Quran became the main source of Islamic learning. But one danger was still lurking. In sacred books even minor differences can become a source of great controversy. It was feared that if people wrote the Quran on their own, differences in transcribing (*kitabat*) e.g. writing 'eether' for 'either' and in recitation would create widespread dissension and there would be no way of putting an end to it. For instance, just one word in the first chapter of the Quran was written in different ways according to the pronunciation of different dialects: *maalik-e-yaumuddin*, *malik-e-yaumuddin* and *maleek-e-yaumuddin*, etc.; with the passing of time and changes in the style of writing, the differences in the manuscript would have become a source of great contention. Therefore, on the advice of Umar, Abu Bakr decided to have an authentic copy of the Quran prepared under state patronage and thus put an end forever to the possibility of phonetic differences obscuring the true meaning of the text.

For this purpose Zayd ibn Thabit was the most competent, as he was the *katib* of the Prophet. Zayd and Ubayy ibn Kaab both had joined in the 'last recitation' having heard the Quran directly from the Prophet in the order still extant today. Not only had they memorised the entire Quran, but they also possessed the whole text

in written form. The first caliph commanded them to collect all the available parts of the scriptures and to compile them. (Bukhari). After this decision had been taken, Umar made an announcement in the Mosque that whoever had any piece of writing from the Quran should bring it and hand it over to Zayd.

During the first caliphate, the Quran not only existed in written form on the bark of date palms, stones, leather, etc. but was also preserved in the memory of the companions. The Quran, when made into a book, was arranged in the order memorized by the companions, and the verses have been preserved in that same order right up to the present day.

Zayd ibn Thabit's work was more a process of collection than of compilation. That is, the scattered bits and pieces of the Quran in written form were collected by him, not just to be assembled and bound in one volume, but to be used to verify the authenticity of the Quran as memorised and passed on in oral tradition by countless individuals. Once this exact correspondence between the oral and written forms of the Quran had been established beyond any reasonable doubt, Zayd proceeded to put the verses of the Quran down on paper in their correct order.

Harith Muhasibi writes in his book, *Fahm As-Sunan*, that the transcription of the Quran was nothing new, because the Prophet himself had arranged for it to be

written down. But it was written separately on *Riqa'a*, *Likhaf*, *Katf*, *'Asib*, etc. All the materials on which the Quran was written were available in the Prophet's house but had not been put in any special order. What the collector did was assemble all these parts and then bind them together so that no part was destroyed. (*Al*, *Itqan*, v. 1, p. 40)

This elaborate arrangement of the Quran was made so that there should not be even the minutest discrepancy vis-à-vis the original revelation. If this extraordinary care had not been taken, differences would have resulted from the slightest lapse in memorizing and transcription. For instance, when Umar recited this verse to Zayd ibn Thabit, "As for those who led the way, the first of the muhajirs and the Ansar, those who nobly followed them," Zayd said, that he remembered this verse with *waw*, that is, with 'and' after Ansar. So, the investigation started, and finally the other memorizers of the Quran came and confirmed that the opinion of Zayd was right. So, in the volume the verse was written with the addition of 'and'.

In former times, when the accepted way of disseminating the subject matter of a book was to memorize it, then recite it, it was quite exceptional that the Quran should have been preserved in writing as well as memorized. This was like having a 'double checking' system, whereby memory plus written words and written

words plus memory could be constantly compared for verification.

After Zayd ibn Thabit had prepared the entire Quran and bound it in the form of a book, all other materials collected from different companions, for the purpose of checking and rechecking, were all burnt. Now this volume was handed over to the caliph. After Abu Bakr's death it remained with Umar, the second caliph. After the death of Caliph Umar, it remained in the custody of Hafsa, daughter of Umar and wife of the Prophet.

During the caliphate of Uthman, Islam had spread far and wide, and the number of Muslims was legion. Moreover, the companions who taught the Quran had gone to different countries that had come within the fold of Islam. For instance, the Syrians learned the Quran from Ubayy ibn Kaab, the Kufans (the inhabitants of Kufa, a city in Iraq) learned the Quran from Abdullah ibn Masood and the Iraqis in general from Abu Musa Ash'ari. However, due to differences in accent and styles of writing, controversies again began cropping up. People even called one another heretics owing to such differences.

Ibn Abi Daud writes in his book, *Al-Masahif*, quoting Yazid ibn Muawiyah Nakhai, that once when Huzayfa ibn AI-Yaman was present in the mosque of Kufa, he found a group reciting the Quran. One of them recited a certain verse and said: "This is the way of recitation

of Abdullah ibn Masood." Another recited it with a different accent and said that was how Abu Musa AI-Ashari recited it. Huzayfa, enraged on hearing this, stood up and admonished this group: "Those before you (people of the book) differed just like this. By God, I will go riding to the leader of the believers, Uthman, the third caliph."

Huzayfa was a military officer posted in Armenia and Azerbaijan and had just come back from doing battle. But when he reached Madina; and witnessed the scene in the Prophet's mosque, instead of going straight home, he went directly to the third caliph and addressed him thus: "O Leader of the believers! Take care of the people, before they fall victim to the differences regarding the book of God just as the Jews and the Christians did."

During the caliphate of Uthman there entered the fold of Islam peoples whose mother tongue was not Arabic, and who were not able to speak the language with the proper accent and pronunciation. Even the various Arab tribes themselves had different accents and pronunciation. Hence the variations in the recitation of the Quran. The result was that the Quran, too, began to be written according to varying pronunciations. Ibn Qutayba writes that the Bani Huzayl tribe used to pronounce 'hatta' as 'atta'. Since

Ibn Masood belonged to this tribe, its members saw no reason to deviate from this pronunciation. Such differences in recitation came to be reflected in the transcription of the Quran, this being only one of many such examples. Given this state of affairs, Uthman, as advised by Huzayfa ibn Yaman, had copies made of the volume prepared by Abu Bakr, then sent one copy each to all cities. This task was again entrusted to Zayd ibn Thabit Ansari, who was provided with eleven people to assist him. As per the order of the third caliph, the committee wrote down the Quran in accordance with the spelling of the Quraysh, so that it should conform to the accent (*lehja*) of the Prophet of Islam. Caliph Uthman subsequently ordered that all other copies of the Quran, which people had written on their own, should be handed over to the government. These were all then burnt by his order.

By this method, all the copies of the Quran were made uniform as far as writing was concerned. However, taking natural differences into consideration—since all the people were not able to pronounce the Quran uniformly—permission was given for the Quran to be recited with seven different pronunciations and accents. The collection prepared by Abu Bakr was done one year after the death of the Prophet. The copies ordered by Uthman were produced fifteen years after the Prophet's death.

These copies of the Quran, made with extraordinary care and precision, were passed on from generation to generation until the age of the press dawned. Many printing presses were then established in the Muslim world, where the beautiful calligraphy of the scriptures was reproduced after its content had been certified by memorizers of the Quran. Thus, once again, with the help of the memorized versions and written texts, correct, authentic copies were prepared; then with the publication of these copies on a large scale, the Quran spread all over the world.

It is an irrefutable fact acknowledged by the orientalists, that any copy of the Quran found in any part of the world at any time will be exactly the same as that handed down to the Muslims by the Prophet in his last days, arranged in the form still extant today.

CHAPTER TWO

Divine Arrangement

The Jews were commanded by God to preserve their holy book, the Torah. The responsibility for preserving these early divine scriptures thus fell to their followers, whereas it was God who Himself shouldered the burden of keeping the Quran intact: 'We have, without doubt, sent down the Message, and We will assuredly guard it.' (15:9) Earlier scriptures were books of God just as the Quran was. The only difference was that the bearers of those books failed in their task of preserving them, and hence they lost their original qualities. As for the Quran, God having taken it upon Himself to provide His special divine succour for its safeguarding, it remained in its pristine state.

This, however, does not mean that angels will descend from heaven in order to keep the Quran under their protection. The present world being one of trial, the realities of the next world remain hidden from us in this life. It can therefore never happen that the angels will virtually come down in order to guard the Quran. All

such things are achieved in this world under normal and not extraordinary circumstances. Here this task is to be performed by us normal human beings, and through historical processes, without the veil of the unseen being lifted. Events throughout human history bear out God's fulfillment of His promise—Muslims as well as non-Muslims, individuals as well as communities have been pressed into this service by God. So far as the former prophets are concerned, they were unable to secure sufficient numbers of followers to provide a strong guarantee of the preservation of the book of God. But the case of the Prophet of Islam is distinctly different from that of the other prophets. On the occasion of Hajjatul wida, the last pilgrimage, which the Prophet performed two and a half months before his death, he was accompanied by one lakh and forty thousand Muslims on the plains of Arafat. One can guess from this that by the end of his life the number of believers, both men and women taken together, must have been around five lakhs. This number is quite extraordinarily large, considering that the world population in ancient times was much less than it is today. After the death of the Prophet this number went on increasing as nation after nation embraced Islam. In this way a vast human group came into being as had never previously existed for the guarding of any other revealed scriptures.

Another helpful event that followed was a series of conquests both in and outside of Arabia by which the Muslims progressively gained dominance over a vast inhabited territory of the ancient world and established the greatest and the strongest empire of the time. This empire, too strong to be overcome by any other power, was well able to guard the authenticity of the Quran, resisting all onslaughts for over a thousand years. Then with the advent of the age of the press, the possibility of the Quran ever being destroyed was finally ruled out.

In the age of the press it became possible to print a million copies from just one manuscript—something which had been an impossibility in ancient times, when each copy was separately hand-written. That was why one copy differed from another to some extent. This happened with all ancient books. It was only in the case of the Quran, of which tens of thousands of copies had been separately hand-written before the age of the press, (a large number of copies are still available in museums and libraries) that, amazingly, there was not the slightest difference between one manuscript and another. If Muslims became so alert and sensitive to maintaining the perfection of the Quran, it was because of God's special divine succour.

Besides this, there was another God-inspired arrangement. That is, the unique method of committing all of the text to memory, which came to be practiced

in the case of the Quran—a method which had never before been applied to any other book in the history of mankind. Hundreds of thousands of people were motivated (by God) to learn by rote the text of the Quran from beginning to end. Right from the beginning of the Quran down to our own day, thousands of people known as *hafiz* (those who commit the whole Quran to memory) have existed in every generation. History tells us that there is no other book whose followers have shown such extreme care in memorizing its text. It was this custom of remembering the Quran by heart that made its preservation possible. This unique system was termed by a French orientalist as 'double-checking', i.e. first matching the contents of one copy with another and then checking it again from memory.

Every procedure followed for the protection of the Quran for 1500 years of Islamic history was assisted by God. However, in order that this world should remain a testing ground for mankind, all this took place under a veil (that is, although it was God who influenced events and motivated the people, He remained hidden, because man is on trial in this world). On Doomsday, when all realities are laid bare, people will observe how God Himself was directly performing the task of guarding the Quran right from the beginning of the Islamic revolution to the advent of the age of the

press, which with its more sophisticated method of replication, facilitated the rapid propagation of God's message.

There is another vital aspect of this special divine arrangement for the eternal continuance of the Quran: God requires the Muslims to preserve not just its wordings but, more importantly, its meanings. Whereas the test of former people of the book lay in perpetuating the exact wordings of their scriptures, the real test of the Muslim ummah lies in the guarding of their scriptures' meaning. Since the Muslims' predecessors failed in their test, God Himself undertook the responsibility of keeping the Quran intact.

As a matter of divine trial, Muslims have to prove that they do not deviate from the text in their explanations and interpretations, and of having kept everything in the exact place designated by the Quran. In their commentaries, they must take the greatest care to make no shift in emphasis, for that would be tantamount to altering the goals of the sacred text. When presenting the Quran to others, they should convey exactly what it asserts, no less and no more.

The failure of Muslims as the people of the Quran lies in their forgetting its spirit and using the Quran simply as a book of blessing rather than a book of guidance. When Muslims' degeneration reaches this stage, their activities become directed away from the

basics of Islam. They refer to their religion, their holy book, as being matters of national pride. Others engage themselves in show business in the name of Islam. Yet others exploit it for political gain.

All these activities, even if they are indulged in in the name of the Quran and Islam, are all deviations from sacred principles. If Muslims persist in engaging themselves in such activities, they will not escape the wrath of God. If they feel satisfied that they will be saved on the ground that they have spared no effort in preserving the words of the Quran, they are grossly mistaken. God will hold them responsible for having distorted the meanings of the Quranic text out of all recognition.

It should be clearly understood that the Muslims will be taken to task for the meaning of the text just as the earlier peoples of the Book had been taken to task for having altered the wording of their scriptures. It is on this point that the Muslims are perennially tested. Having changed the meaning of the Quran by their self-styled interpretations, they cannot escape the wrath of God simply because they have made no change in the text.

No man can be tested unless he be given freedom of action as well. Muslims are free to interpret the text, but not to alter it. One must fully grasp this point that the punishment meted out to other peoples of the Book

for altering the *wordings* of the divine text will be meted out to Muslims for altering the *meaning* of the text. Herein lies the gauge of the Muslims. If by their self-styled interpretations they change the meaning of the sacred text, they cannot be spared divine punishment by the mere fact of not having changed the actual words. It is because the test of man lies in his sphere of power. Now, forbidden to change the words of the Quran, Muslims can change only its meaning. So it will be on this very point that they will be taken to task.

Eternal Truth

Prophet Moses, born in Egypt in the 15th century B.C., was chosen by God to be His messenger. In those days, Egypt was under the dynastic rule of the Pharaohs, who were idolaters. Prophet Moses encountered two of the kings of this dynasty: one was appointed to be his guardian by God, while the other was one with whom he came into confrontation during his missionary struggle.

When Moses presented the Divine Message of Truth before the latter Pharaoh, he turned against him. To prove the genuineness of his prophethood, the Prophet Moses showed the miracle of his rod turning into a serpent. Pharaoh said that it was mere magic, and that his people too could perform such feats. So, Pharaoh ordered all the magicians of Egypt together on the occasion of a national festival in order to nullify the miracle of Moses by demonstrating their superior skills in magic. At the appointed time the most renowned magicians from all over the country duly gathered in the royal court. When the Prophet Moses arrived,

he not only surpassed the performance of the court magicians with further miracles, but he also made a very significant speech, a part of which is as follows:

> "What you have brought is deception. Surely God will render it vain. God does not bless the work of the evil-doers. By His words He vindicates the truth, much as the guilty may dislike it." (10:81-82)

What Prophet Moses said at that time was in fact a proclamation of God's eternal verdict. In the present world man has been granted freedom so that he may be put to the test. In consequence, untruth has had the opportunity to mar the human condition. But this rise of falsehood is only a temporary phase, for the system of the world is so perfect that it does not accept untruth for long. After a period of time, it rejects all falsity. It is truth and truth alone which will endure.

This law of God was manifest in ancient times just as it is manifest today. That is why, in the time of Prophet Moses, the sorcery of the magicians was set at naught by the miracle granted to Moses. This phenomenon of truth finally conquering untruth has been repeated many times throughout the ages in different forms. In present times God has ordained this through human knowledge itself, advances in knowledge and science having made it possible to prove with finality the unassailability of divine Truth. With the revelation

of the Quran, the events that were to unfold found expression in these words:

> We will show them Our Signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the truth. Does it not suffice that your Lord is watching over all things? (The Quran, 41: 53).

The commentator, Ibn Kathir has explained this verse in these words:

> "Soon We shall make manifest the truth of the Quran through the external arguments of reasoning."

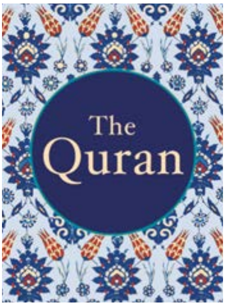
This verse of the Quran needs to be looked at in the context of posterity. These are the words of a Being before whom are ranged not only the generations of that time, but all succeeding generations.

Addressing itself to all the peoples of the present, past and future, this verse declares that whatever is presented in its own times on the basis of revealed knowledge, will in the future have its authenticity proven by advances in human knowledge itself. What is merely a matter of assertion today will become a confirmed reality tomorrow.

This prediction of the Quran has been proved true in the fullest sense. In ancient times when the magicians countered Truth with magic, God demolished their magic. In present times when the case for atheism was projected without its having any basis in truth, God

made all the arguments in its favour vanish into thin air. By the same token, whatever is raised up against Truth will in like manner be demolished,—as has happened in all ages. God's word, its veracity intact, will be perpetuated, for all time to come.

THE QURAN
ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

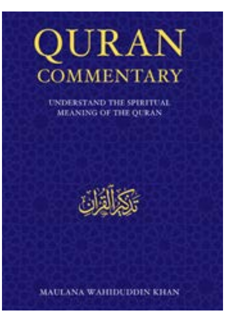


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The Quran is the Book of God that has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. Written originally in Arabic, it is accessible through its translations to the non-Arabic knowing world. English is truly the international language. The Quran Complex, Madinah, Saudi Arabia in a research on the English translations of the Quran concluded: “In spite of 47 English Quran translations, none has received the acceptance of the modern world.” (Bibliography of the Translations and the Meanings of the Quran in English [1649–2002]) To fill this gap, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan worked tirelessly to translate the Quran in English which was published in 2008 under the title The Quran. Edited by Professor Farida Khanam, the translation is in contemporary English, lucid, easy to understand and has received universal acceptance. In its introduction the Maulana explains that the Quran aims to bring about an intellectual revolution within man, called ma‘rifah (realization of truth) (5:83) and make him aware of the Creation plan of God. That is, the purpose of the Quran is to tell man why God created this world; what is the purpose of settling man on earth; what is required from man in his pre-death life span, and what he is going to confront after death.

The Quran, thus, serves as a guide for man in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

THE QURAN
ENGLISH TRANSLATION, COMMENTARY AND PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT BY MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN



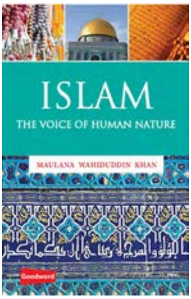
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The Quran is the Book of God for all mankind that has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan translated the Quran in Urdu and wrote its commentary in the modern scientific idiom entitled Tazkirul Quran. This has been translated into English as The Quran: English Translation, Commentary and Parallel Arabic Text. Edited by Professor Farida Khanam, this commentary lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered all around us in the world. It focuses on spiritual development through contemplation and reflection, and by the activation of one’s own thinking processes, bringing out the underlying lessons of the Quran and applying them in one’s life. The wisdom, beauty and essence of the teachings of the Quran constitute the main focus of this work. Therefore, the meaning of the Quran is expressed in such a way as to give readers a clearer understanding of the message of the Quran and make it relevant to them and enable them to apply the Quranic principles in their daily lives.

MORE BOOKS, BOOKLETS AND LEAFLETS OF MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

BOOKS

Islam: The Voice of Human Nature



In this book, the author explains that only God-centered religion is real and in harmony with human nature and proves that Islam is the voice of human nature.

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Religion and Science

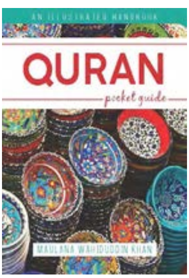


The author proves the truth about religion as science proves any other facts. If things can be proved through direct argument, then truth can be proved through the inferential argument.

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BOOKLETS

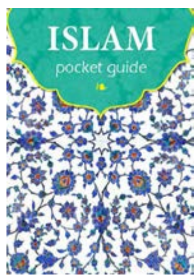
Quran Pocket Guide



The book is a must-read for one who wants to understand the message of the Quran. The message of the Quran is to make man aware of the creation plan of God.

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Islam Pocket Guide

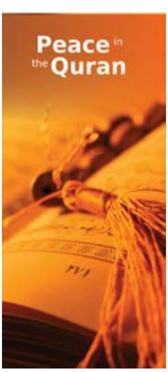


The book explains that the concept of God in Islam provides man with an ideology in which loss is turned to gain and in which adversity brings with it good tidings.

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The leaflet explains that judging by the consequences, the way of peace is far better than that of confrontation. Violent activism should not be indulged in if peaceful activism is an option.

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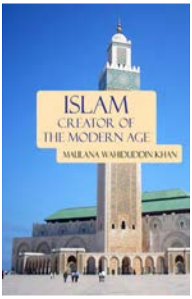
Read more such books, watch videos and listen audios of Maulana Wahiududdin Khan at www.cpsglobal.org

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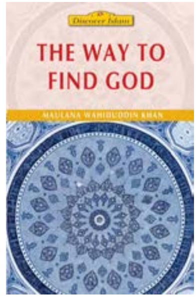
Islam: Creator of The Modern Age



The book examines the aspects of the Islamic revolution and how they were instrumental in creating the modern age.

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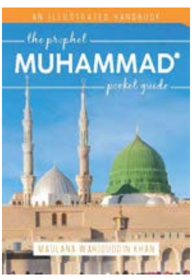


The book explains that man requires guidance in his search for God and that the universe provides man with such guidance in visual form and silent language.

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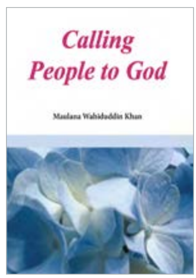
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Man Does Not Stand Alone



The leaflet explains that in this vast universe, man's only source of support is God. It is by God's guidance that man's ship is brought safely to the shore.

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The Destination of Man



The leaflet explains that the Creator of man has created him as an eternal creature and has divided his life into two stages—the pre-death period or the limited life in this world for a test and the post death period or the eternal life after death for reward or punishment, based on how he performs in this world.

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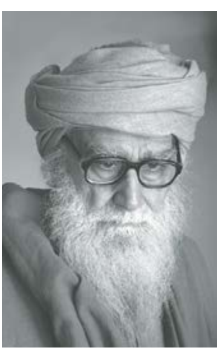


THE QURAN

AN ABIDING WONDER

This collection briefly discusses two aspects of the Quran: firstly, its being in itself a proof that it is the Book of God; secondly its complete preservation in its original form, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

God had made many revelations to His chosen slaves, but what particularly distinguishes the Quran from them is that the text of the Quran has never been tampered with, whereas all the other scriptures have long ago lost their original form and content, which has meant a serious loss of authenticity.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

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